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James Lenox.

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THE

WORKS

OF

THE REV. THOMAS ADAM,

LATE RECTOR OF WINTRINGHAM.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR OGLE, DUNCAN, AND CO.

37, PATERNOSTER ROW, AND 295, HOLBORN.

1822.

LENOX LIBRARY
NEW YORK

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TO THE READER.

THE following Discourses are offered to the Public as a tribute of good-will towards them in their best and most important interests.

They were composed by the Author many years ago, and delivered both to his own and other congregations with a kind acceptance, and, as he humbly hopes, not without some benefit.

Being now, through the increase of age and its attendant infirmities, rendered unable any longer to deliver the word from the pulpit, he is desirous of contributing to the good of his fellow-creatures, by such means as an indulgent Providence still leaves in his power.

The experience of many years has afforded him an opportunity of trying the doctrines contained in them; and he is happy in being able, after repeated trial, to send forth this testimony to their blessing and veracity. Every period and circumstance in life have convinced him more and more of the truth and importance of those doctrines which are peculiar to the Gospel of CHRIST JESUS, and of their absolute necessity

in order to the happiness, holiness, and salvation of mankind.

It has been his grief to see these so much neglected, and other foundation substituted, to the overthrowing of the Scriptures, the great dishonour of God and of our Church, and the extreme injury of the souls of men.

As a friend, therefore, to society in general, and as one who has a sincere regard for the Established Church in particular, he sends forth these sheets for the perusal of the Public. The object of his heart's desire is not to captivate admiration by any elegance of style, or striking novelty of sentiment, but to do good to the heart;—to be an instrument in the hands of God of convincing men of their wretchedness and ruined state, without a saving interest in Jesus Christ, and of the emptiness and insufficiency of all religion which has not HIM as its All in All; and, at the same time, to discover to them the way by which the faith of Jesus Christ is effectually operative to every good work.

It lies near to his heart to see so many well-meaning persons, who, through want of instruction in these particulars, are mistaking the form of godliness for religion, and the works of the law for the Gospel of Christ; and stumbling at the only way of life and salvation, to their own very great misfortune, and the exceeding injury of Christianity.

As one, therefore, that has nearly finished

ıs course, to whom applause or censure are f little weight, but the salvation of souls ıost precious, he wishes to do all that yet :mains in his power to undeceive them in so nportant a matter; and if it shall please God ıat he may but be so happy as to succeed ı promoting this good effect, his whole desire ı answered.

J. S.

PREFACE.

My design in the following discourses is to set before the reader the chief points of Christian doctrine, and bear my testimony to the free grace of God in the salvation of man, as the way of peace, comfort, and holiness, in opposition to any scheme, thought, or opinion of *self-justification.*

The guilt and damnableness of sin — the acknowledgment of *our own sin,* and earnest contrition for it — faith in Christ for our acceptance to a state of forgiveness, and the reward of eternal life — fidelity and grateful obedience to him from a sense of his benefits — renunciation of our own righteousness, as an absolutely insufficient ground of salvation, and deep humility in every stage of our progress — and a new birth from the Spirit, enabling us to lay hold on and improve the mercy offered us, to repent, believe, and love; — these are the great, comprehensive truths of the Gospel, and what evidently distinguish it from all other religions.

An opinion of the powers of nature, or a sufficiency in man for the great end of his creation, present and future happiness, is so riveted in the

minds of all, that we find it very difficult to get rid of it. The eye of reason is not so dim but that it can discern between good and evil — approve the one, and dislike the other. And this discernment, though sadly defective in the execution, is taken for rectitude, or some kind of merit in us, and set up as an equitable claim upon divine goodness for remission and indulgence, if not favour and reward. Hence the rejection of all revelation in some; and in others, a mistaken notion, or partial acknowledgment, of the Christian scheme of redemption, as if it was only a better rule, enforced by a perfect example in its Author, with a fuller discovery of future rewards and punishments.

I would, therefore, humbly propose a passage of St. Paul to consideration, as a compendious state of the whole nature and design of Christianity, and a clear exposition of its ends, means, and manner of operation; or how it is fitted to effect the great purpose of reformation in the deep ground of the heart, promote our return to God, kindle our love, and secure our obedience to him, by faith in Christ, as the Mediator between God and man, saving us from wrath by the sacrifice of himself, and communicating his merits to us for our final acceptance. The passage I mean is this, 1 Tim. i. 5. "Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. The end of the commandment"—

what God requires of us, and intends to bring us to by the Gospel — " is charity " — the love of God, and of our neighbour, consequent upon it — " out of a pure heart " — a heart purged from idolatrous love of the creature, and purely devoted to him — " of a good conscience " — a conscience established in a sense of peace and reconciliation with God — " of," and by, " faith unfeigned." So that, according to this genealogy of charity, as Dr. Hammond calls it (though he does not give each part of it its proper distinction), *faith* is the parent of a *good conscience*, or a conscience purged from the sense of guilt, as that is of a *pure heart;* and *love*, springing from them all, completes the character of the Christian, and gives us a full view of this masterpiece of divine wisdom for the recovery of man to holiness. If we keep close to this method, we may be sure our endeavours in religion will be crowned with success. And, on the contrary, if we build upon any other foundation than faith in the pardoning love of God, we have no reason to hope that any thing we do will prosper in our hands. We shall consider him, in the main, as a hard task-master; and, by neglecting the means of his appointing, fail of the great end he intends to bring us to, and in which the health and recovery of our natures, our fitness for present communion with him, and the everlasting enjoyment of him consist, viz. freedom of spirit in his service, and willing obedience from love.

Let it be taken for granted as much as yo please, though it is far from being true, that me generally propose this end to themselves, still th question recurs, *how*, and by what *means*, it attainable? By repeated efforts? By reflectior on the loveliness of God, his goodness in natur and wisdom in the formation and support of th universe? Let them convince us of his being an providence, as they ought; let them be the sul jects of our inquiry and admiration, as the deserve; let them be admitted as helps to buil us up, when once we are upon a right foundatio and have gained a competent knowledge fro Scripture of the grounds and reasons of o vanity and misery. For it must be owned th the world is a mixed scene at the best. O comforts are few and transitory; our disappoin ments great and lasting. Sin, like poison, worl ing in our blood, must necessarily trouble o repose; and God, to show his displeasure again us for it, ever and anon breaks in upon the ord of his own establishing, in his severe judgmen and calamities; and crosses, sickness, and deat are the common lot of all. Now, the contempl tion of a Being who made us for happiness, an for the most part withholds it from us, cann have the desired efficacy to fix us in a state pure love, unmixed gratitude, and filial subjectio to him. He does not expect it should. He ha pointed out to us surer means, and furnished u with better helps, for the attainment of our grea

nd; I hope I have the Christian reader's leave
o say what;—"His love shed abroad in our hearts
y the Holy Ghost." And if the manifestation
f it, in the manner declared in Scripture, by
ending his Son to be the propitiation for our
ins; if his unspeakable grace and goodness to
s in our fallen state of weakness, impurity, and
lienation from him, does not draw from us suit-
ble returns of love, and unite us to him in a
acred bond of everlasting, unalterable gratitude,
e may venture to say that nothing else will.

Here, then, is one insuperable difficulty in the
ay of the religion of nature. Suppose discern-
ent, and choice of the end, yet the means of
ttainment are, if not wholly wanting, yet insuf-
cient; though I believe we are chiefly beholden
o revelation for our knowledge of both. I would
ot be understood as if I thought these, or any
ther means, would be effectual without the
peration of a Divine Spirit; and I fear those
ho think so are not enough sensible of the
epth of their corruption, the deadness of their
ills, impotence to good, and natural inability to
ring themselves up to their duty; or else they
ake a false measure of it, and too easily persuade
hemselves, that what they can do in their own
trength is all they ought to do, and all that God
xpects from them. But then, as God has made
s rational intelligent creatures, and reason the
overning faculty in us, so he acts with us suitably
o our natures. He informs and enlightens the

understanding, shows us the best end, stirs us up to the prosecution of it by the best motives, and works with us in the use of them; and though we *can* do nothing without *Him*, he *will* do nothing without *us*. Though he is beforehand with us in his instructions, offers, persuasions, and influences, yet, without approbation and compliance on our parts, and the due exercise of our intellectual powers, no effect will follow. Reason is first blind in the things of God; but, with the help that is offered us, capable of admitting the light when it is presented to it, as the bodily eye does that of the sun; and one has no more light of its own to see by than the other. But when it is restored to itself, so as to acknowledge its incapacity, and depend upon God for direction and assistance, it will be the instrument, in his hands, of conducting us to happiness. We may now appeal to it for decision in those capital points of revelation, necessarily previous to a new state of faith and love, the dreadful malignity of sin, the necessity of repentance, and the unavailableness of it without the great atonement. For, admitting the truth of that assertion, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," supposing the guilt and damnableness of sin, what can man do for the removal of it from his conscience? Can we, under a forfeiture by our manifold transgressions of the divine law, and sure to repeat them, presume upon the favour of

the Lawgiver? Will you venture all your hopes upon the delusive imagination that sin has no guilt, or, if it has, no ill consequences? Or must God, instead of condemning sin, condemn himself, and give up the purity and holiness of his nature, by leaving it unpunished? Let the disputer of this world consult his reason in the case, and try the strength of it where it may be of use to him. He has no objection to the love of God, though perhaps he would never have thought of it, if the Gospel had not told him that it is the first and great commandment. But then, what must he think of a Being who, in his own opinion, is regardless of truth and justice? or how can he make such a supposition the ground of his love of him? And, on the other hand, how can he love God under a sense of guilt unremoved, and just apprehension of his displeasure? So far reason accompanies us; but then here it leaves us all at once terribly embarrassed, and incapable of giving ease to our own minds by any certain or probable conclusion concerning the hopefulness of our state. One ray of light from above, in this perplexity, is worth a world. Tell me how sin can be pardoned in such a way as to augment, instead of diminishing, our dread and hatred of it; tell me how guilt can be cancelled without defrauding infinite justice of its rights, or how the sinner can be restored to the friendship of God without injury to any of his perfections, and hope will spring up in the soul; reason

may be satisfied with a method of reconciliation which it could not contrive; and in proportion as it is understood and believed, religion will have its end, and God be restored to the possession of our hearts.

It is no small advantage in favour of Christianity, that, all things considered, the nature of God, the demerit of sin, and the necessity of a pardon, we cannot help wishing it to be true. It must be owned, that a divine assurance in the case, to encourage our hope, promote our amendment, and be the ground of our love, is far better than weak surmises of a will in God to receive all to mercy, without regard to justice, or the extirpation of sin; a supposition which is attended with infinite difficulties, and must for ever leave us in a state of uncertainty in a matter of the greatest moment to our peace. And though the greatness of the person, the God-Man, by whom our relief is conveyed, and reconciliation effected, is magnified by some into a formidable objection against the truth of the Gospel, we presume to say, it is the beauty and glory of it, and grand support of the whole; the clearest demonstration of the infinite evil of sin, of God's hatred of it, and will to punish it; the most awakening call to mankind to forsake it, the strongest proof of his love, and the surest foundation of trust in him. If a sacrifice of atonement was wanted, where could we have found one in all nature of sufficient value to purge our

sins, satisfy the divine justice, bear the whole weight of our guilt, and pay the full price of our redemption, but that of God's appointing? What other would not have been liable to more objections, and less capable of quieting all our fears? And if it should be said, that *his appointment* would have made *any* of sufficient value, this is more than we know, and need not be afraid to deny. What we suppose God has done, is the best proof of what ought to be done. But if we should allow it not to be absolutely necessary, still it must be granted, that nothing could have afforded us so strong a conviction of the misery of our condition in sin, and the glory of divine mercy, or have been so powerful a means of promoting our conversion to God in love, the essence of holiness, as the great dignity of the Mediator, and the stupendous method of our deliverance.

But what I would chiefly observe is, the precise nature of that *faith* which has such effects ascribed to it in the aforementioned text; which denominates the conscience good or clean in the sight of God, and at ease in itself, purifies the heart, and brings on a gracious habit of love. It is not only assent to the Bible, as a divine revelation; it is not, principally, the belief of a future state, as therein brought to light and inculcated, with a prevailing regard to things invisible. The first of these is necessary in order to faith; the latter is the consequence of it, an excellent

part of it, or faith in exercise; but neither one, nor both of them together, will bring out St. Paul's conclusion, or be the ground of that love which is the end of the commandment. 'I believe the Gospel revelation; I believe a future state, and that I must be a new man to attain to the happiness of it; therefore I love God and man.' This is not the argument; the premises do not necessarily, or but remotely, lead to the conclusion. No; but 'God has made all his goodness pass before me, in the forgiveness of my sins, and receiving me to a covenant of life; Christ loved me, and gave himself for me; therefore I can, and do love.' This is sense, this is nature; here is a powerful call to the soul; in this way of reasoning all is clear, and one thing follows and supports another. And therefore the precious faith of the Gospel, its peculiarity, and great distinction, as an efficacious principle of holiness in love, as far as human agency can be concerned, is, and must be, what our church defines it,—"a lively sense of God's mercies in Christ;" (Church Catechism); "a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises, to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ; whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments." (Homilies, 3d part of the sermon of salvation.)

It is also worthy of observation, that as this golden chain of divine truth, wherein one link depends upon another, is necessary for all, so

it is alike suited to the understandings and capacities of all. As it is alike wanted by all, so it speaks with equal force and conviction to all, by speaking to the heart. It requires no depth of learning, or extraordinary subtlety, to comprehend it; but is a plain appeal to the common state of man, and what one may be as sensible of as another. The remission of sins by *faith*, and from thence *peace in the conscience*, sweetly engaging to *inward purity*, and disposing for obedience in *love*—this is such a method of relief, as every man may know and experience within himself to be suitable to his case; the cure of a wound which he feels; and which all, having the same nature, must feel alike, and be led by this feeling, as they are in other cases, to seek a remedy. Propose any other method of cure, go to the schools of the learned, explain their systems, employ all their eloquence, use all their authority, and what have you done for the bulk of mankind? But let a few illiterate persons, by divine commission, carry this Gospel into all lands—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses to them"—and the heart of man, whether rich or poor, simple or learned, will echo to the sound, and every string of it be touched with the offer of such love. In the name of the God of love, and in pity to mankind, let it be fully declared to all! Let us rise up as one man against all sacrilegious attempts, whether of

Mystic or Socinian, to vacate the doctrine of *atonement*: which is no other than tearing out the heart of the Bible, depriving faith of its ground, and the Gospel of its comfort, and thereby of its efficacy to convert and purify the heart. Let us not pretend to be wise above what is written, by laying any other foundation of acceptance and newness of life than faith in the Son of God; not only as living in us, but dying for us; to deliver us from wrath by the very blood he shed upon the cross, take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, make faith, in the chief Scripture notion of it, possible, and an effectual principle, in the Spirit's hands, of holy love, joy in God, and delight in his commandments.

But still it is alleged, 1. That insisting so much on the doctrine of salvation by faith, faith alone, or present forgiveness, and eternal justification, by the grace of God to every man, is useless, if not hurtful; that it is establishing a fanatical, enthusiastic notion of faith, which in the main has no other tendency than to lead men into a state of dangerous presumption and false security, and to make them less careful of their obedience; and that therefore it is better, in a general way, to ply them with exhortations to holiness, supposing that they are competently instructed in the grounds of Christian knowledge, and want chiefly to be stirred up to the practice of what they believe. For which, 2dly, The example of Christ himself is urged. It is said,

we hear little or nothing from him of faith, thus understood, in his discourses to the people.

1. The first objection consists of several parts. But St. Paul, we presume, has struck at the whole in this admirable description of Christian theology here produced. It is plain he knew of no other way of securing obedience, directing us to the most perfect kind of holiness, and animating us to the attainment of it, than Gospel comfort, or peace with God from a root of faith. The difficulty was often thrown in the way of his preaching — "Let us sin that grace may abound." But what then? Did he flinch from it, or alter his method? No; he rejects the imputation with scorn and abhorrence, and cries out, 'God forbid! Impossible! How can this be? Death with Christ to the condemnation of sin, is death to the power of it; and if we truly believe that we died with him in one respect, in him paying the debt of sin, we shall make it our business, chief aim, and great hope, to die with him in all others.' He was a stranger to that distinction, which has since been invented, between works of the ceremonial and moral law; as if the former only were excluded from the office of justifying. Neither would the Jews of his day have had any dispute with him upon the question so stated. It does not appear that they put any such confidence in the ceremonial law, as to suppose that the most punctual observation of it would entitle them to the favour

of God. And if it can be doubted what the law was which St. Paul chiefly meant, what law it was which tormented his conscience, set death before his face, and made him fly to the faith of Christ for relief in the distress of his soul, he himself will tell us plainly, and thereby open a way to every man for the discovery of his own sin; it was that sting in the law of the ten commandments, "Thou shalt not covet." This darted into him the light of heaven; he found he was guilty of evil lusting in the depth of his heart, and stood chargeable with the sin of an apostate, opposing will. And when he saw the truth, he suffered it to come home to him. He knew there was no trifling with a divine command; especially one so like the first, the breach of which brought death into the world; that it would be to little purpose to plead nature, or strength of temptation, or trust to an unknown mercy in God against his own express declaration, as men generally do, to the exclusion of repentance, and rejection of faith, through ignorance of its necessity; and this conviction fastened upon him with all its force, that a will and desire in the heart of man opposite to the will of God must necessarily bring condemnation along with it, and that the law would infallibly do its whole office upon him, in commanding first, and then judging. Behold him a new man in a new world, cheered with a sense of remission, with his eyes opened to see more fully the danger he had

escaped, the mercy of his deliverance, the blood of God shed to procure it, faith his title to it, the blessed Spirit clearing it up to him, and working at the bottom of all his convictions; and what would he do? Sin against all this astonishing grace, make it a handle for careless presumption, rebel against the authority and grieve the heart of his Redeemer? Or be all on fire to testify his gratitude, by doing what was required of him, and say triumphantly, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost?" Upon this view of the matter, I think we may venture to dismiss the objection for ever; and challenge all the world to show a scheme of religion so well adapted to the state of sinful man, to bring him out of his fall, and put all the powers of his soul in motion towards God, by this glorious display of his goodness. And why then should it not be largely insisted on among Christians, proved, explained, gloried in? As it is not only our necessary relief from the guilt and condemnation of sin, but the purpose and contrivance of infinite wisdom to establish the law, make obedience pleasant to our souls and acceptable to God, by laying the foundation of it in love, and carry us on with a swift progress towards that perfection of good works, for which so much concern is avowed. Ah! this is nothing but Satan transforming himself into an angel of light, and putting us off with

a form instead of the power of godliness; which can have no being but in a heart warmed with a sense of redeeming mercy. And if some should make it an argument for sloth, or take occasion from it to harden themselves in impenitence, this, it must be confessed, is a most wretched abuse of it, but no reason for giving it up, or speaking but coldly of it; since it is the great expedient in the compass of divine knowledge for bringing *any* to the truth of holiness, by the renewal of their minds in love, which is God's image in man, and must fit us for glory. Happy, thrice happy is that age and country where the knowledge of Christ, and faith in him as our life, is so general as to make it the less necessary to dwell upon these topics. But if there be any such, I fear it is not ours. And besides, how should this faith and knowledge ever be general any where, but by having been some time or other carefully and frequently inculcated? How should they long be preserved any where, if the method by which they were first established is discontinued? And how should they be otherwise revived, where they are too generally disregarded, than by being again fully opened and explained?

2. But Christ himself, it is said, did not so; he was a preacher of moral righteousness, and laid the greatest stress upon that: and where can we have a better model, or equal authority? Now

the ground of this objection is partly true, and partly false, and the whole of it capable of a satisfactory answer.

It was a matter of the utmost consequence that Christ should establish a pure and perfect morality, as the mark his followers were to aim at, and to prevent the cavils of his adversaries, who he knew were ready to take exceptions at his person and preaching: and that because at some times, and upon some occasions, he actually furnished them with a handle for it, by declaring that way of salvation which was to be fully opened after his death, and could not before. To have been altogether silent upon it, would have given too much countenance to the foregoing objection; and to have made salvation by faith in him, as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the world, the constant subject of his discourses, would have been in some measure authorizing his death, and acquitting his murderers. Neither could the point, however great and interesting, be insisted on, nor spoken of but in a covert way, nor so much as understood before the event. The full declaration of it as a fact, it is evident, could not be made before it became such, but must of necessity be reserved for his apostles; on whose testimony it stands, and who were appointed by him, with his own full authority, and power from the Holy Ghost, to do what he could not, that is, to open the doctrine of his kingdom, to explain the nature,

and proclaim the benefits of his death. He was therefore in very delicate circumstances. The sacrifice of his death was to be the ground of his religion, and faith in it the means of our acceptance with God and renovation to holiness. The last of these he might speak of without reserve; and it was expedient that he should, to clear himself from all imputation of diminishing one jot from the sacredness of the law. He therefore explains and proposes it in its utmost purity; both to enforce it as a rule, and prepare mankind for a new economy, by awakening the conscience to a sense of guilt in coming short of it. The two former he could not speak much of, for the reasons before mentioned; and yet he has said enough to destroy the force of the objection, of which we have undoubted proof from many passages of St. John's Gospel, particularly the third chapter. And it may also fairly be collected from other instances, that he did not conceal the great peculiarity of his religion, viz. "salvation by grace, through faith." "Think not," says he, "that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets." Now what ground could there be for such a suspicion, if he did not really destroy the law, the ceremonial law wholly, and the moral in one sense, viz. by speaking of it as insufficient for justification, and sometimes in the course of his conversation and preaching declaring what was sufficient? Or if the words were designed to obviate a calumny, which he

knew would be taken up against the doctrine of faith when it should afterwards be more fully preached, either way they will turn out to our purpose; if he did not openly avow and inculcate the doctrine himself, it is plain he intended that others should.

Again, when the Scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery, to know his sentiments of the crime, and what punishment was due to it, it is expressly said that they did it with a view to find matter of accusation against him. And to prevent all evasion, or possibility of escape from the snare they had laid for him, they put him in mind of what Moses had already determined in the case. What! could it be supposed that he who had declared for such a degree of purity in the matter, as to pronounce the looking upon a woman to lust after her to be adultery, would deny the guilt, or lessen the punishment of the outward act? No; but they knew he had a way of his own of clearing both from guilt and punishment; that when he said, "Repent and believe the Gospel," he meant something more by the last word than some do now; and concluded that he must either deny what he asserted upon other occasions, or stand convicted as an abettor of loose morals, and a subverter of the law. The sequel is known. With admirable address he extricated himself from the difficulty, to the confusion of his adversaries, without betraying either law or Gospel.

He would neither retract what it may fairly be supposed from this instance he used to say of the one, nor destroy the obligation of the other; He established both by pardoning the sinner, and condemning the sin.

But whether Christ spoke but little, or not at all, of the doctrine of faith, and whether the reasons assigned for his not insisting more upon it himself are sufficient or not, still the conclusion fails; it cannot be inferred from his example, that he did not intend the greatest stress should be laid upon it in the future preaching of his ministers. And I think he himself hath set us right in the point. For how runs the commission to his apostles, when he had laid the foundation of faith in his death by dying, and could no longer be under any reserve in the matter, but must be supposed to give them the clearest instructions in the nature of their office, and point out precisely the message they had to deliver? "Go ye," says he, "into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." What Gospel? He adds, by way of explanation, "he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned;" Mark, xvi. 15, 16. How remarkable is this! I mean, the *shortness* of the commission. Surely for this very reason it demands our utmost attention, and is ample conviction to us, what account is to be made of faith; since Christ summed up the whole Gospel in it, and gave it in charge to

his disciples to lay this foundation, and propose salvation to all by *believing*. This, I say, is placing the article in a very strong light. But still it is too generally evaded, either by substituting different notions of faith in the room of what is here alleged as the true, or by a loose supposition that, as *faith* is in order to *holiness*, so it is the business of the preachers of the Gospel, at all times, to lay themselves out chiefly in securing the latter. Let no endeavours be wanting to secure it. We hope we have our eye steadily fixed upon it, and upon the commission, as more largely expressed, Matt. xxviii. 19, 20; but then let God teach us the way of doing it. Let it be considered again, and always well remembered, that mercy, or a lively sense of the love of God, in our discharge from condemnation, is the best, if not the sole *means* of attaining it; and that going to work without them, or keeping them for the most part out of sight, is taking men upon the foot of nature, appealing to an ability which they have not, and leading them into a dangerous mistake concerning their whole state and condition in the sight of God. That it is a state of sin and condemnation, the Bible was written to inform us; and that we can only be brought into a new condition of friendship with God, lively hope, and faithful working, by a sure trust and confidence in his mercy, discharging us from guilt, and accepting our persons in Christ. There is no trifling with this one sacred method of re-

covery to the love of God, and the desire of holiness, by a sense of his goodness, as manifested in the work of our redemption. The stronger the faith, the greater our love and fidelity; and we desire once more to be informed what other root they can spring from, or how they can be built on any other foundation. If this notion is branded as enthusiastic, we conceive the apostles of our Lord lead us into it; and to them we appeal, as infallible expositors of his meaning in the instructions he gave them. For it may here be remarked upon the whole, that the chief design of Christ's ministry, was not to bear witness of himself, or deliver an entire plan of his religion; but to furnish his apostles with the proofs of his being the Christ, when the time came for its being published to the world. It is, therefore, a mistake of some consequence in those who set up the authority of Christ against that of his apostles, and terminate their religion, as it were, in the history of his life, recorded by the four evangelists; which is only preparatory to the full manifestation of his Gospel, in its grace, peace, and happy effects, by those whom he commissioned for that purpose; and whose authority in the case, as being that of the Holy Ghost, and in no respect inferior to his own, is final. "To them was committed the ministry of reconciliation;" and as they had the mind, so they had the command and power of Christ to open the grand design of his coming. What that is, St. Peter

will tell us, Acts, x. 43: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins;" remission of sins in our best, as well as worst estate. Let this be acknowledged, and that in our highest attainments we must be undone without mercy from the Lord, and it will be evident at once what faith is, and what kind of it must be always in exercise. Salvation, by a free gift to all who receive it in a deep sense of their unworthiness, will then appear in its full lustre, as the pure Gospel, and the necessary relief of sinful man.

I now presume to address myself to my reverend brethren, with respect, and beseech them to consider what kind of preaching is most likely to revive the decayed spirit of religion among us, and make our Jerusalem again a praise in the earth.

We are, under Christ, the depositaries of that grace of God which bringeth salvation, and, if we know our office, ordained to dispense it in all its freedom and fulness; — that grace, which can only be effectual to its end by being received as such — that grace, which makes the Gospel glad tidings, by placing man out of the reach of condemnation, notwithstanding the power and malignity of his corruption, and the holiness and purity of God—that mystery of godliness, which destroys sin by pardoning it, and lays us in the dust to raise us as high as heaven—that glorious,

comfortable manifestation of God, which reconciles all his attributes, and makes the offer of mercy and peace to a lost world an act of his justice — that grace which, in the inward spiritual experience of it, is the life of a sinner, turns his eyes, heart, and whole soul to God, kindles his hope, and invigorates his obedience — that grace which was the basis of the Reformation, in opposition to an inveterate prevailing opinion of self-righteousness, as a claim for heaven—the awakening of the nations to an evangelical taste and sense of the love of God in Christ, gladly embraced, gloried in, and suffered for—and which, I doubt not, will precede every other reformation of the church, and be the beauty of it in its highest state of perfection upon earth, as it is the triumphant song of the saints in heaven (Rev. v. 9); though now so hardly admitted, so much diminished, so rarely or so cautiously spoken of. Alas! we live upon the stock of our forefathers, and guide ourselves in the apostolical purity of the church we belong to (and apostolical it is, if its liturgy, articles, and homilies, may be allowed to speak for it); and at the same time too generally conceal or discountenance those very doctrines on which it is founded, and by which it is distinguished as a separation from some of the grossest errors of popery. A multitude of great and respectable names, even at some considerable distance from the era of the Reformation, shall give in a full testimony to the doctrine of salva-

tion by grace, through faith in the merits and imputed righteousness of a Redeemer, and still be held in great veneration by us; and yet those who now stand out as witnesses of it, and pave the way to it, by laying open the deep apostasy of man, bringing a charge of sin against all flesh, and proclaiming aloud the utter insufficiency of all works and services to atone for transgression, to reinstate us in the favour of God, to heal and comfort the contrite heart, are vilified, and run down as enthusiasts; and their self-denying pains in vindicating and illustrating the most essential precious truths of the Gospel are branded under the name of the *new preaching*. The charge of novelty may well be denied; and it is a little surprising from those who have the Bible in their hands, and the Articles of the Church of England formed upon it. But I fear there is no great mistake as to the matter of fact. It must be owned, that salvation by faith alone, and a previous sense of the curse of sin, to make deliverance welcome, and faith possible, has not of late entered much into our idea of preaching; and all attempts to revive it are almost as much wondered at, as the blessed Paul was, when he constantly affirmed, that, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." But surely it is matter of consideration, whether this truth must still continue in force among us, and be made the ground of our preaching as the sole relief of conscience labouring under a sense of

guilt, and the means of our establishment in holiness; or give way to popular essays on the reasonableness of virtue, or any display of the excellence of Christian morality, and the warmest exhortations to the practice of it, when the right foundation is not laid. It would be cruel mockery of one perishing with hunger, to speak to him of the nature of food, and the suitableness of it to his case, without putting it into his mouth. It is not less so, but much greater cruelty, to amuse our hearers with discourses on the beauty and necessity of holiness, and urge them earnestly to reformation, and, at the same time, withhold that truth from them, which is appointed of God, and revealed by him in great mercy for the life of their souls. As I said before, it is appealing to an ability which they have not; and, what is still worse, confirming them in an opinion of it, and can have no other tendency but to keep them from Christ. For every man would be self-saved if he could; and is easily encouraged to substitute the decency of an outward character, profession of religion, humanity, and acts of beneficence, in the room of that profound knowledge of sin, which brings us to God in penitence and self-abasement; and casts the soul, helpless and undone in itself, upon the Lord Jesus Christ, for his righteousness and salvation. Which, as it is something without us, and wholly undeserved, it is evident can only come to us in a way of believing; that is, in the sense of our absolute want of

it, and the unfeigned joyful submission of our hearts and wills to it. And if this is properly Gospel mercy, what God offers to man for his unspeakable benefit, what Christ came to assure and derive to us, and the Spirit enables us to receive; if it is the alone efficacious call of God to the soul in its dead state, and the beginning and power of a new life of righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost: if by it we are renewed to the divine image, and to the desire of holiness in the inner man; and can only be formalists, hypocrites, or self-deceivers, without it: if we have no ground of hope, not one glimpse of comfort, no relief from sin, supposing the guilt of it, and the truth of Scripture, but by laying hold on the promises of God: if faith saves us, in every respect, *from* condemnation *to* a lively obedience, and nothing else can; — how great must be our guilt in not fully publishing and declaring that message of peace and good-will to men, which the angels came from heaven with so much joy to proclaim! How can we bear, how shall we answer the imputation of such unfaithfulness to Christ and his truth, and to the souls committed to our care? And why is not that charge continually sounding in our ears, and deeply imprinted in our hearts, "Go, and speak to the people all the words of this life?" Oh! let us try, in dependence on the all-powerful Spirit, what can be done for our sinful country, in this despised way of the *new preaching*; and

unite to rescue it from contempt, lest the nation perish through unbelief. We have great cause to reflect deeply on the abounding of wickedness among us under the *old*, and I wish we had no reason for trying some other method.

I shall be excused for stopping here, and beseech you to bear with me thus far, as I am not conscious to myself of having uttered a word in the spirit of contention; or with any other design than to recommend an attention to those articles of our church, which were once thought to be of the greatest importance. And supposing they are not intended only to be hung up as rusty armour, but of perpetual necessary use for the maintenance and establishment of Christian truth, to them I appeal against any censure which may be passed upon me.

Perhaps the sameness of thought which runs through the following discourses, and insisting on two or three points, may need some apology. If this is a real objection, I confess I know not how to answer it. They are published at the request, and in submission to the judgment of partial friends, who interest themselves in the doctrines recommended and so often repeated in them; and thought they might be of use, at least to the few already prepossessed in favour of the author. Every one has his small circle of well-wishers, who are more disposed to receive impressions from him on the score of acquaintance; and to them, with desire to serve them in their best

interest, they are addressed; though it would be a criminal insensibility in me, not to wish that others also might reap some benefit from them.

They are accompanied with my prayers for a blessing: and I shall have cause to rejoice, if they may contribute, in any measure, to the conviction of the unbelieving, the instruction of the ignorant, or the edification and support of those, who are seeking rest for their souls in Christ, and want to have their hearts purified by faith, that they may serve him in love, be partakers of his holiness, and received into his glory.

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

ill acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid:
aid, I will confess my sins unto the Lord, and so thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin.— Psalm xxxii. 5, 6.

E two first verses of this psalm, St. Paul alleges to ve that great point of Christian doctrine, that as all are ners, there is no possibility of salvation for any man, in the free grace of God in Christ. The psalmist s, "Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven, l whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom Lord will not impute sin." Which words St. Paul es up, and argues from them in this manner; if David ught himself blessed, not by having no sin, but by fessing it, and casting himself upon the mercy of God the pardon of it, well may others think themselves ppy in the offer of that mercy, and fly to it as their pe and only refuge from condemnation. Saints or ners, Christ, he affirms, must be their safety, and the ound of their acceptance with God; for so Abraham, friend of God, and David, the man after God's own urt, were justified, or accounted righteous. Whatever y were in themselves, or in comparison with other n, this was no plea for them to stand upon with God. they would find favour at his hands, they must give up

all pretensions to a justifying righteousness of their own, and instead of making God their debtor, be saved by grace, in common with the rest of mankind. They *must*, and it is happy for us that all *may* be so saved; and that there is a sufficiency of grace and merit in Christ for the worst of men, if they will but lay hold on it: "For this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

From all this it is evident, that, let the case of any be ever so bad, their being sinners does not exclude them from the hope of salvation; but is the very reason why they should come to Christ for it, as to save them was the very end of his coming into the world; and David here says, that we might say it after him, "Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin." You see he lays a heavy load upon himself, and adds one word to another to express the sense he had of the guilt of sin, and the greatness of his own. One, who has less sincerity then he, would have been content to say, "Thou forgavest my sin;" but this was not enough for him; like all God's children, he had a piercing sight of the abominable nature of sin, and would not diminish one jot from the horrible guilt of his own; observe, he says, 'the *wickedness* of my sin.' Well, then, your sin too may be forgiven, whatever it is, with all its guilt and wickedness; and when your fears rise up against you, the text stands up on your side, and unless God is a respecter of persons, you may plead it as his own word for the mercy of your forgiveness. If you are a Christian, you know how this forgiveness comes to every soul of man, and have great cause to be thankful that you live at a time when Jesus, the Saviour of sinners, has been manifested to the world in all the power of his name, and all the riches of his grace. Blessed be God, the Bible is our birthright; and you would think it your estate of inheritance, and greatest earthly treasure, if

you did but consider what glad tidings it brings you, and that it tells you of what no other book, no man upon earth, ever could, remission of sins, full discharge from condemnation, and peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Oh! how happy might you be, what comfort would you find in your souls, what pleasant lives would you lead, if you were rooted and grounded in the belief of God's love to lost mankind! And think, on the other hand, that if you are not seeking after the great blessing of forgiveness by Christ, nor rejoice to hear it preached, nor live to God in the faith of it, you perish for ever.

But, then, it is not your baptism, nor Christian name and appearance, that can afford you any assurance in the point. The text I am going to open has weighty instruction for you, which must not be lightly regarded. Your sin must be known; the guilt of it must be discovered to you; the burden of it must be felt in such a measure as to bring you sorrowing to Christ, and make deliverance from it the most welcome news you ever heard. You all know you want forgiveness, and think you trust in him for it, and have no other hope; but if you have no ground for this belief in yourselves, no heartfelt sense of the accursed nature of sin, and of your own sinfulness, no experience of the misery of your condition without Christ, you delude yourselves with a vain fancy, and are utter strangers to a work of the Spirit: for if ever he brings you to Christ, it must be in the way of repentance, self-knowledge, and fulness of confession. This, then, is the point which the text leads me to speak to. It is a hard one, and so the psalmist found it to be; for he tells us he was brought very low, because he dealt deceitfully with God, and did not search himself to the bottom: but, nevertheless, there is no other help for it; the method he took to come at his relief must be submitted to by all; and here it is set up as our guide to

God's peace, and to Christ the purchaser of it.—"I will acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid: I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord;" that is, fully, without reserve, and without guile, which for a time he did not. I shall, therefore, with God's help,

I. Show that the confession of our sins must be full and hearty, without disguise, reserve, or exception.

II. Consider what helps and means we are to make use of for this purpose.

I. The confession of our sins must be full, sincere, and hearty, of all and every one, as sins against God. And to this purpose let us observe what David here says of himself in the verses immediately before the text; "While I held my tongue, my bones consumed away through my daily complaining; for thy hand is heavy upon me day and night; and my moisture is like the drought in summer." Whether it was trouble of mind, or, what is most probable, pain and wasting in his body, occasioned by the inward vexation and sorrow of his mind on account of sin, he found no relief from it; and he tells us why he did not; he says, "I held my tongue;" that is, though I was burdened with my sin, pined, and mourned, and complained incessantly because of it, yet I did not take the way to be eased of my complaints, by going to the root of my disorder. He was neither ignorant nor insensible of his sin, nor unconcerned about it; he was sorely grieved and afflicted, and knew that the hand of God was heavy upon him for it, and, therefore, made some acknowledgment of it: but still he was held under his trouble, because he was deceitful in the matter, and did not lay open all his sin before God, in a full and free confession of it; which, to all the intents and purposes of

a pardon, was the same thing as if he had held his tongue, or said never a word of his sin to God.

Now you are not to conclude from hence that God deals exactly in the same manner with all, or that there is no way of coming to a thorough sense and acknowledgement of sin but by being first brought into great bodily trouble and affliction, or even to death's door, as the psalmist was. It may, or may not be so, as God pleases, who knows best what every man's particular case requires. And what is here said should be a caution to you, when you see any greatly afflicted, and pining away under a sense of their sins, not to bestow your foolish unmeaning pity upon them, or to judge rashly of what you are ignorant; for it is the way which God takes with some, to bring them home to himself, and none can so feelingly rejoice in God their Saviour, or are so well fitted for the service which he has for them to do in the world, as those who have been deeply troubled, and smarted severely for sin. But this all are to take notice of from the passage before us, and conclude certainly, that so long as they deal deceitfully with God and themselves in this matter of sin; if they will not go to the bottom of the sore; if they hold their tongues, or are guilty of concealment; if they would plead for, or have a thought of retaining one sin, they are not in the way of their relief; and if they can by some means or other make their conscience easy the meanwhile, yet assuredly there is no hope of their pardon.

We have a lively picture in Adam and Eve, of what men are naturally apt to do in the case of sin. When they knew that they were naked, naked in sin, and could not help seeing, in some measure, what they had done, they sewed fig-leaves together, to cover up their sin and shame from themselves as well as they could. When they found the Lord God was coming near to them, their next

attempt was to hide themselves from his presence amongst the trees of the garden. And, when they were brought to their examination, they both endeavoured to shift off the guilt of what they had done from themselves, she to the serpent, and he to the woman. So we, truly their children in this respect, stand out against God as long as we can; we would hide our sin from ourselves, and from him too if we could, and turn ourselves into all shapes to avoid coming to a full confession of it. Some part of it we cannot deny, and may be willing to own, especially when conscience, enlightened by the word of God, begins to be troublesome, and tells us of our danger; then we cannot be wholly silent before him, nor satisfy ourselves, without saying something to him of our sin. But, verily, we are here told that this is doing nothing at all, and just the same thing as if we altogether held our tongues. I do not suppose we are so foolish, or ignorant of the nature of sin, and of what God requires of us, as to think we can be entitled to pardon without some kind of confession: but if we confess some sins, why not all? Or who gave us a license to except any? Surely not God; for all sin is alike to him; and the will to retain any, shows plainly that we dislike and repent of none upon true grounds, because it is sin, and brings us under the guilt of stubbornness and rebellion against God.

It is true, our sins are so many that it may not be in our power to make a distinct mention of them all; which is a very good reason why we should be as careful as possible to avoid them in the whole course of our lives, because they cannot be called back by a particular remembrance; but none at all for shuffling with God and our consciences, or concealing and making a reserve of any that we do know. If you do, it is at the peril of your souls; and the point before us is this, — if you hide, or keep back, or excuse any one known sin, you cannot be

in God's way of mercy. For what is it that you have to say to him in such a case? It is even horrible to think of: "Lord, such and such sins trouble me, and I freely confess them to be sins; but there is one or more which I cannot part with, at least not now, though, perhaps, I may some time or other." Do not deceive yourselves; for whilst you are in this mind, this is all your confession amounts to; and though I have put it to you in such a manner as may well make you astonished, yet God knows it to be the very language of the heart. Forgiveness from the Lord is well worth obtaining at any rate, and it is a grievous thing to think of living and dying without it; but he is at a word with us, and has given us the text as our guide to the mercy he has to bestow on us: "I will acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid; I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord, and so thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin." You have often heard and repeated these words in the course of the Sunday's service, without thought or serious application of them to your own state. I beseech you, ask yourselves, and learn from me the meaning of them now. Doubtless, you would have your sins forgiven, and live all your days in that comfort. Then, here is your rule; you must acknowledge them, you must hide none of them, you must confess them all to the Lord. It is a vain thing to think of being accepted of him while you spare one. One sin is sin, and the wages of all sin is death. What better then would you be, supposing that all others were confessed, if there is one still standing out against you to condemn you? Though you are not an adulterer, a fornicator, or a profane swearer, yet if you are a drunkard, or an evil-speaker, or a sabbath-breaker, or so bent upon the gain of this world as to keep your heart from God, you are an unrighteous person, and the sentence upon all such singly is, "They shall not inherit

the kingdom of God." The enemy of your souls, the devil himself, will suffer you, or, if it be possible, even help you to confess all your sins but one, if he could be sure you would keep that one. And, by confession of sin, you will understand confession with a purpose to forsake it; and that not only, or not chiefly, because you would be hurt by it in your body, estate, worldly interest, or reputation; but with a lively sense upon your minds that it is sin against God, and that his will is to be your law in all things. So think, and so do, and then as you are without guile before God, naked and open to yourselves as you are to him, you may assure yourselves that you are the blessed of the Lord, and that your sins are forgiven. If you value this blessedness, and desire above all things to obtain it, you will be glad to hear,

II. What helps and means you are to make use of for this purpose, namely, that the confession of your sins may be full, sincere, and hearty.

1. To this end, set before you the law of God in the ten commandments, not once or twice in your lives, but often. You might do it daily, if you were so disposed, and the oftener the better. The point already insisted on was, that confession must be made of all sins as distinctly and particularly as possible, without keeping back, or sparing any. None of them must be hidden from God. He knows them without our speaking, and we cannot hide them from him, if we would; but he wants to have *us* know them, and by telling him, to tell ourselves of them. And the way to do this is to make conscience of studying his commandments, in order to be well skilled in them, whatever else we are ignorant of. He says, Thou shalt do this, thou shalt not do that: alas! what will become of us if we live at random, and care for none of these things? Or how shall we put ourselves in the way of God's for-

giveness, if we have no will to know what he requires of us, and wherein we have offended? I say, then, if you would confess your sins to God in truth and sincerity, and have a sure guide in this necessary work, make it your business to understand and be well grounded in the will and law of God, as set before you in the commandments. Think them over one by one, from time to time, and lay yourselves constantly to that rule, with this knowledge always at hand, that it is at the hazard of your souls if you do diminish any thing from them.

The law consists of two parts, one relating to God, the other to our neighbour, and both are equally sacred. Now, if you could justify yourselves in respect of your behaviour to men, yet can you say that you are as clear in respect of your duty to God? That you love him and his worship, that you honour his holy name, and delight in his sabbaths? Or do you shrink up all your religion into the decency of an outward appearance, and centre all your hopes in the regularity of your moral or prudential conduct, to the neglect of what both reason and revelation teach you to regard in the first place, and, perhaps, with an utter contempt of devotion to God? And, on the other hand, supposing that you are a devout worshipper of God, and strict in the performance of all religious duties (which you know you are not), are you equally exact with regard to men, so as to bear malice or ill-will to none on any account whatsoever, never to injure, defraud, or speak evil of any man, or withhold any good from him that is in your power, and want makes his due?

This is the method you must take, if you would be in earnest with God and your souls; and, whenever you do, you will find work enough for confession, and cannot be far to seek for many sins which now are never thought of. But this is not all; the law of God reacheth to the

heart, and if you do not go with it into that depth, and keep a watchful eye upon what passes there, you do nothing. Christ tells you of murder and adultery, without the outward acts of those sins; and if there be anger, or uncleanness, or any evil motions and desires abiding in the heart, his law strikes at them as well as outward sin; and if we do not search and condemn ourselves for all sin, both secret and open, we shall make but lame work of our confession. What is the reason that many are so blind to themselves, think so little of the necessity of forgiveness, and entertain such low and unworthy notions of the greatness of our redemption by Christ, but because they are wilfully ignorant of the extent and purity of the law in every part of it, either making no account of their duty to God, and sins against the first table, which certainly are not less than others, or tracing none up to the heart, where God looks for them, and, according to the state of it, judges every man's condition?

2. If you would have the comfort of knowing that you are sincere with God and your souls in your repentance and confession of sin, go over the several stages or parts of your lives, and consider what you have done, and how you have behaved in each of them, as child or parent, master or servant, husband or wife, together with the sins you are most liable to from your constitution or particular calling; and do this likewise with the commandments in your hand, and with a strict regard to that rule. Remember, the point is whether your sins shall be covered or not; imputed or not imputed; all forgiven, or all standing out in full force against you, at the hour of death, and the day of judgment; and no helps for coming at the knowledge of them must be slighted. If there is no forgiveness of sins, but by a full and free confession of them, and if you truly desire it, you will search for

them every where, and in every part of your lives, as carefully as you would for a thief, who you knew was lurking in your house to rob and murder you.

3. Call to mind those awakening awful words which stand at the head of the ten commandments, and have them deeply imprinted in your hearts—"I am the Lord thy God." Whose authority do you despise, whose law do you break, whose will do you rebel against, when you venture upon the commission of sin? The will and law of that God, whose creature and servant you are, who made you for obedience, and strictly requires it at your hands, who has revealed himself to you as a God terrible in judgment, and forewarned you that contempt of him and his law will expose you to his heavy displeasure, and bring inconceivable and everlasting misery on your soul and body. Let not this part of Scripture be always a dead letter to you; but if you would know the curse and exceeding great evil of sin, and what cause you have to confess and lament your own before God, ask yourselves, what was it that turned Adam out of paradise, and brought death into the world? What was it that drowned the earth with its inhabitants? What was it that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? What was it that crucified the Lord of glory? And, again, when you hear the words, "I am the Lord thy God," think who it is that made and preserves you, and surrounds you with his benefits, whose bread you eat, whose sun shines upon you, whose rain waters your fields, whose providence continually watches over you, whose love follows you from the cradle to the grave, whose arms and bosom you lie in, at whose will you draw every breath, who gave his only begotten Son to save you from the curse and ruin of your sin, and hath provided an eternity of happiness for you; and this will show you the meaning of David's expression, 'the wickedness of my sin,' in so strong a light, and every

act of disobedience will look so great in your own eyes, that you will think no acknowledgment, confession, or humiliation, can come up to the height of it.

And farther, if you would take knowledge of these words, "I am the Lord thy God," and suffer them to have their full force upon your minds, it would be an excellent means to bring you to the sincere confession of *all* sin. For one sin is as much sin against God as another; and if you truly confess any one for this reason, you will think yourself bound for the same reason to confess all; that is, as I have already observed to you, with repentance, and an unfeigned purpose to forsake them. You may not have been so happy all your lives as to say with respect to every sin, as Joseph did, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God;" but if you would find mercy from the Lord, there must now be an end of your guile, and vain attempts to hide your sin from him; you must now say, and upon examination you will find cause to say it, with respect to the breach of every one of the commandments—"I *have* done this great wickedness, and sinned against God, against the majesty and sovereignty of the just and holy Lord God, my Maker, Preserver, Governor, and Judge; woe is me, for I am undone! I will acknowledge my wickedness, and be sorry for my sin; Lord, have mercy on me for what is past, and for the time to come incline my heart to keep thy whole law."

4. But there is yet another help in this case to be mentioned, because without it all the rest will be ineffectual, and that is, prayer: prayer to know the God with whom we have to do; prayer to know ourselves; prayer to see our sin, to know how vile it makes us, and that we shall be extremely and for ever miserable, if it is not confessed, forsaken, and forgiven. "For this," says David, "shall every one that is godly," that is, every one who has

regard to God, and desires to live and die in his favour, "make his prayer unto thee," namely, to have the wickedness of his sin forgiven. And in order to this he will likewise pray for a spirit without guile, to know himself for what he is, nothing but a sinner; that upon an humble confession and acknowledgment of his condition, without disguise or extenuation, he may find deliverance from his guilt and misery, and be refreshed with a sense of forgiveness. Consider how apt we are to deny, excuse, or palliate our sins, and what pains we take to hide them from ourselves; nay, how hard they are to be truly known, insomuch that if the Spirit does not convince us of them, they will always be concealed from us, as to their number, guilt, and heinousness, and your first prayer to God will be to have them discovered to you. If you dread them as your greatest enemies, and the wall of separation between God and you, till they are known and confessed, your cry will be, "try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart, prove me, and examine my thoughts;" and if you do not thus pray, you trifle with your souls, and can have no proof to give of your sincerity. Elihu's advice to Job was, to say, "that which I see not, teach thou me;" and he took the advice, and was taught it. As great a saint as he was, he saw his own sin, and all sin, as he had never done before. "Now," says he, upon the full conviction he had received of the greatness, majesty, and purity of God, and the vileness of man, "mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Let me now remind you of the first words of the exhortation which is appointed to be read in the morning and evening service, before the general confession; and I pray God you may now and always seriously attend to it, and consider it in your hearts: "Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wicked-

ness, and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the face of Almighty God, our heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart, to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same by his infinite goodness and mercy." Is it, indeed, true that we may obtain forgiveness? What, of sin, one act of which brought death into the world? Forgiveness of our numberless sins? May we hope for it? Are we assured of it? Yes, from the mouth of God himself, over and over again; and when the penitent soul presents itself before him with this confession, "I have sinned against the Lord," the answer of all Scripture is, "The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." Acknowledge, confess your sins, hide them not, and though they are more in number than the hairs of your heads, the wickedness of them shall be forgiven. It would have been a grievous thing if we had been left in a state of uncertainty whether we shall ever find mercy at God's hands; and his judgments upon sin and sinners, recorded in Scripture, are very terrible to think of. But nevertheless we know they are his judgments upon the obstinate, impenitent, and unbelieving. The thunder of them rolls innocently over the heads of the humble and contrite; and that one saying is worth a world, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John, i. 9.

You think I preach strict doctrine to you, and I fear make it a pretence for disregarding it, and continuing unawakened, to the great hazard of your souls. My brethren, the truth is strict, and if I conceal it, or diminish any thing from it, it is at the peril of my own soul as well as yours. We *are* sinners; we have sins innumerable, and, if they are not known and confessed, they will ruin us for ever. This is the truth of Scripture;

and what you must all come to, think and say what you please. But I beseech you to hear me a word more. Do I ever tell you of your sin, the guilt and danger of it, without telling you of your remedy, and pointing out to you the precious means of your safety? Do I not constantly preach Christ to you, as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" and declare to you from time to time, that the assurance of your pardon is sealed to you in his blood? And is this strict? Is it not very comfortable? Is it not enough to make the heart of a condemned sinner leap for joy, to hear that "God laid on him the iniquity of us all, and that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus?" Is not this a more blessed relief to the conscience, distressed with a sense of guilt, than putting you upon the hard service of undoing the accursed effects of your sin, and making your peace with God as well as you can, by any repentance, humblings, endeavours, or works of your own? Are not those sweet words which I have already brought to your remembrance, "if we confess our sins," in truth and sincerity before God, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins?" That is, he is, and cannot but be faithful to his word and promise; and moreover true to justice, which is now brought over to our side, and engaged by covenant to grant the forgiveness which Christ has purchased for us.

It was the saying of one who had a deep insight into the corruption of human nature and the guilt of sin, that he would creep upon his hands and knees to Jerusalem for a pardon, if there was no other way to obtain it. You need not go so far; the glad tidings of peace with God are brought home to your doors, and it is your own fault if you do not receive them into your hearts, and live and die in the comfort of them; and I would now remind you of this, as another excellent means and help, if not

of all others the best, to come at the bottom of your sin, and engage you thoroughly in the work of searching for it in life and heart. In the examination of yourselves call in faith to your aid. See your sin pardoned in Christ, and you will be the less afraid to see it in all its guilt, to confess it sincerely, mourn over it with godly sorrow, and for his sake resolve to renounce it. It was another saying of the same person, no less a man than Martin Luther, that he always hated the word *repentance* till he understood the meaning of that text, Rom. i. 17, "Therein," in and by the Gospel, "is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live," live because made just, "by faith;" as I said before, it would have been a great discouragement in the way of self-searching, if we did not know beforehand that it would turn to account, and had been left in a state of uncertainty as to the issue of it; as we must for ever have been, if we had nothing to trust to but the merit of our own repentance: but when Christ is presented to our faith as the Peace-maker in his blood, and we can boldly bid defiance to sin in the strength of his atonement, we shall no longer be disposed to deal deceitfully with God and our consciences, or desire to hide our iniquities, as knowing that Christ bore them one and all in his own body on the cross, and that forgiveness waits upon the humble, penitent acknowledgment of them.

There is a legal or natural, and a spiritual or evangelical repentance: one proceeds from a dread of punishment, rather than sense of the great evil and odious nature of sin; is perpetually haunted with unbelieving fears, continues in the main as averse to God and goodness as ever, and produces no real change, or lasting reformation: the other, beholding the curse of sin, and the mercy of deliverance from it, in the death of Christ,

fights resolutely against it as sin, spares none, desires to lay it all down at the feet of the Saviour, and, in the sense of his love, is as willing to be released from the bondage as the penalty of it. One is before the cross of Christ, and, with the help of God, may in time bring us up to it; but the other only, which begins from it, is sincere, faithful, abiding, and lays the axe to the root of sin. Believe therefore in the Lord Jesus Christ as your peace, your righteousness, and life, thank God for giving you the victory through him, and you will enter upon a state of unfeigned humiliation; call your ways to remembrance, and hide nothing from him. If mercy is sweet to you, as the very thing you want from God, it will put you upon the most vigorous endeavours to secure it, perfect your repentance, and keep you close to Christ in the work he binds upon you, from the sacred consideration of his love. At the same time that you read your forgiveness in his cross, you will see the accursed nature of sin in his death for it, God's vengeance against it, and the extreme danger of your condition, if it is not confessed and repented of. You will be the blessed of the Lord, the men and women "in whose spirits there is no guile;" not because you are free from all spot of sin in yourselves, for then you would have no unrighteousness to be forgiven, or sin to be covered, and not imputed; but because you are in some measure naked and open to yourselves as you are to God, acknowledge the guilt and damnableness of all sin, and the reality and greatness of your own, fly to the mercy of God in Christ for redemption from it, receive your pardon with a feeling heart and a melting eye, and resolve to keep mercy, by endeavouring, as God shall enable you, to purge yourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

But if you think this is strict, and will have mercy in

your own way, though you hide and keep your sins, I dare not deny the Bible, or flatter you to your ruin; your blood will be upon your own heads; the whole truth of God is against you; and when you come to appear before Christ at the day of judgment, you will find, to your everlasting confusion, that he has not forgotten his words, though you do—*repent, or perish.* From all blindness and hardness of heart, good Lord, deliver us; and bring every soul here present before thy mercy-seat, sprinkled with the blood of the holy Jesus, in the true spirit of this prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON II.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. Isaiah, ix. 6.

THE seven first verses of this chapter, of which the text is a part, are a very remarkable and express prophecy of Christ, above seven hundred years before his coming; and cannot, without great force, be applied to any thing but the spiritual deliverance and complete salvation wrought by him. And well might the prophet speak of it as matter of great rejoicing to mankind, and compare it, as he does, to signal victory over powerful enemies, or the deliverance of captives from the darkness of a

dungeon, and the horrors of death, to the enjoyment of liberty, and the comforts of full daylight. Every diligent and serious reader of Scripture will make proper reflections upon these comparisons, and be led by them to consider the alteration made by Christ in the condition and circumstances of mankind. For in truth, striking and lively as they are, they fall short of the reality, and are but a faint resemblance of our natural darkness, misery, and captivity in sin, and restoration to light, freedom, and happiness in Jesus Christ, the child who is here said to be born, and the son given unto us. The former part of the verse, which I have now read to you, will find us work enough at this time; and may God enable us to fathom the depth of these blessed words, and receive the full benefit of them in our knowledge of the Saviour, experience of him in all his offices and characters, as he is here described, and happy deliverance by him! The words, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder," will afford great cause of rejoicing to all those whose hearts the Lord opens to receive them, if we consider,

I. What is implied in the expression, "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given."

II. The nature and value of the gift.

III. For whom it is intended.

IV. The characters of those who receive it; signified to us in these words, "the government shall be upon his shoulder."

I. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." I would desire your attention to the word *given*. When the prophet had said, "unto us a child is born," he was directed by the Spirit to say further, "unto us a son is

given;" that we might know and consider it as the free gift of God to us, from the bowels of his own mercy.—When we remember that the child who was born unto us was his own Son, we see at once that we could have no right to such a favour, no power to purchase it, no thought or expectation of it. It is a most astonishing instance of God's good-will to mankind, and pity for them in their lost condition.—Our lives and the support of them, the bread we eat, the air we breathe, the sun that shines upon us, all we have, enjoy, or hope for, is the gift and bounty of God to us. And we are further assured by his word, that, unworthy as we are of the least of his mercies, "our heavenly Father" is always "ready to give good things to them that ask him." But that he should give his own Son to take our flesh, that in it he might redeem us from the curse we were under, and restore us to life and immortality, is such a token and pledge of his love to us, as far exceeds all our thoughts and all our praises. The angels, we are told, desire to look into it, as if the greatness of the mystery was too high for their understandings, wise as they are, and engaged their attention and admiration beyond any thing that they knew of God.—But so far we ourselves may know and understand, that as God gave his Son, and he freely gave himself for us, so our condition must be desperate for any thing we could do to help ourselves; and that if we do not receive the precious gift at his hands with all humility and thankfulness, we must be left to perish irrecoverably.—God can do no more for us; he has not another Son to give us.—O Jesus, the eternal Son of God! that thou mightest be given, and give thyself to us, thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb.—To help and to save us, thou wast contented to become a man like one of us, and to be the greatest sufferer that ever appeared in our nature.—For thou wast not only a child

born unto us, but a Son given unto us, to be the price of our ransom, and deliver us from death, by giving thyself up to an accursed death in our stead.

II. Which leads me to consider the nature or value of the gift. — My brethren, it is Christ himself, in what he did and suffered for us; living, dying, and rising again, that we might be made "the righteousness of God in him." To speak more plainly, if possible, he was our Peace-maker and Saviour in and of himself, only and altogether in his own person, singly considered; and not by any thing he does in us, or enables us to do for ourselves, as if we had any share or fellow-helpers with him in the great work of our redemption. — "I will give thee," saith God, "for a covenant of the people," that as all fell and died in Adam, when he brake the covenant which God made with him, and with all mankind in his loins, so Christ was to be the Head of a covenant of restoration by grace, and the Author of life and righteousness to all that belong to him, solely by virtue of his own act and deed, and not by the help and concurrence of any other, man or angel. He is life, righteousness, victory, peace, and salvation; insomuch, that by denying him the whole glory of it, and refusing to receive him as a gift from God by faith, we run the hazard of losing it altogether; and, by pretending to be our own saviours, make God a liar, as St. John faithfully, but severely, expresses it. "For this," says he, "is the record"—the testimony and word of truth, and the glory of all Scripture—"that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son." In the *Son*, because, as God, he has life in himself; and, therefore, as all life was from him at first, so when it was lost, it could only be given and restored in and through him.

We are miserable mistakers of the great grace of God

in Christ, and of the nature and value of his gift to us, when we suppose that it could ever become a debt to us by any thing we can do to deserve it, or contributing in the least towards it.—As you would be believers, rejoicing in the hope and comfort of the Gospel, never give way to this proud presumptuous thought. The Scripture requires no such thing at your hands, for you could as soon make a world; but tells you, as plainly as words can do, that it is Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."—Consider what your condition was, and what was to be done for your recovery from it, and you will be convinced at once, that it must be as the prophet says, "his own arm brought salvation to him," not for himself; he did not need it; but to him *for us*. And it is a marvellous opening of his gracious heart towards us, that he would speak of what he did for our sakes, as if it had been wrought for himself. We are under a sentence of death by the sin of our first parents, as well as our own numberless actual transgressions. Can you make full satisfaction to the eternal truth and justice of God, and stay his hand from executing the punishment he has once decreed? The law he has given us, and by which we are to be judged, is a law of absolute perfection; can you fulfil it? Can we, who are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, work out such a righteousness of ourselves as will ensure our title to heaven? Our lost inheritance is to be recovered; our souls must be qualified for it, by being renewed to the image of God, and our bodies raised out of our graves to take possession of it.—Can you do this by any might or power of your own, or by any ability which God giveth, when you have done all you can, and the very best you ever will do? When you put your souls to it to answer these questions, with this rule in your hands, and Scripture knowledge in your

ead, " that the Lord is a God of judgment, and will not lter the thing that is gone out of his lips," and that his aw, once broken, gives you up to death, you will perceive that no after-endeavours, no will, work, or holiness f our own, can deliver us from its curse, or recover the fe we have forfeited.

Behold then what you must do; understand what Christian knowledge and belief is; and the very point a which your safety lies. — When the question is asked, Who shall revoke the sentence of death we are under, nd stop the execution of our deserved punishment? he man who is instructed out of the word of God can nswer, and say, *Jesus*. He came down from heaven on urpose that he might take our curse upon himself, and uffer the whole weight of divine vengeance in our stead; e is " the Lamb of God " that was offered in sacrifice o take away the sin of the world; and make satisfaction o justice in his own person. — When it is asked, who hall present us to God clear washed from all spot of sin, nd in the white raiment of a pure and perfect righteousness? the answer of faith is, *Jesus*. He is the revealed ighteousness of God; in him only it is to be found, and t was wrought by him, not for himself, but to the end hat it might be conveyed and assured to us through him. — When it is asked, who shall create our souls anew to he image of God, raise our bodies from the grave, and et us, soul and body, at God's right hand? the answer f Scripture is, *Jesus;* the Lord Jesus Christ; he is the uickening spirit of our souls, he was delivered for our ffences, and raised again for our justification; he conuered death for us, and carried our nature triumphantly nto heaven; where believers are expressly said to be ith him, raised together, and to have their life hid with Christ in God. — All this comes and is done to our hands y *Jesus*. — It is the might, glory, and great salvation of

the child that was born, of the Son that was given unto us; not our own act in any sense, much or little, nor to be ascribed to us, in whole or in part, any more than the dividing of the Red Sea to the Israelites. When they saw God had divided it for them, they could enter into it, pass through it as on dry land, and sing praises to him for the wonders of their deliverance; and this was all that they could do. So may we, beholding the way which God has made for us to escape, cry to Jesus in the danger of our souls, be sure of help in his strength, and praise God with all our hearts for redemption from sin, death, and hell. And why should we be so foolish as to think of doing any more? Alas! why should we lay a burden upon ourselves, which God knows we cannot bear, and therefore has in great mercy given his Son to bear it for us? Be instructed. Be wise unto salvation. If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved. But then know what it is to believe in him. It is going out of ourselves to Christ, upon the call of God in his word; receiving him as a gift, and the sole Author of our salvation.—This is the answer of a good conscience towards God, when we can apply Christ to it for healing. This is a blessed ease to the heart in all its distresses, and the anchor of the soul sure and steadfast, when our fears run high, and sin has raised a storm within us. And if we had the divine skill of grounding ourselves on Christ for peace, instead of looking for it in ourselves, or in any thing that we do, we might be freed from a world of perplexities, go on our way rejoicing, and be happy all the day long in the faith and hope of the Gospel.

I know that what I am saying can signify nothing to those who never were troubled for sin, are blind to it in themselves, and in no concern about the means of their deliverance. All such will hear it with stupid indifference.—But to those who know their guilt and con-

mnation, it is a most wholesome doctrine, and very ll of comfort; and that one saying of Christ is worth a orld to a burdened soul, "Come unto me, all ye that bour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."— matters not how you came by this faith, whether all once, or by reading and meditating on the Scripture, by the preaching of the word, or by firmly retaining hat you have been taught from your childhood. But ive it you must, and hold it fast, as your hope in life id death. For you can only be Christians by knowing id believing that Christ has done for you what you could ever do for yourselves, embracing him as a gift from od, just as you would an estate to which you have no tle, or release from a sentence of death; understanding ie value of it, and rejoicing in your hearts to hear these ords of the Prophet, "unto us a child is born, unto us son is given."

III. You are now to hear for whom this gift is intended. or sinners; for the miserable sons of Adam over the ace of the whole earth;—for all and every one of us.— o runs the proclamation from the court of heaven; "Ho! very one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he hat hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, yea come, uy wine and milk without money and without price;" ignifying unto us, that it is richly worth our while to uy the Gospel milk and wine, food and gladness for our ouls, at any rate, and at the same time that we have nothing to buy them with, but must take them freely, as they are freely offered to us.—St. Paul says, "When we were without strength, sinners, enemies, ungodly, *Christ died for us.*" Surely, I say, this takes in all, and is good warrant for our believing, that as there is no exception in the text, none was intended. *Unto us,* is

unto all; and God be thanked that the gift is as large and general as it is free and gracious.

There is no room for any to say they do not want it; and they who swell with conceit on account of some goodness or excellence, which they think they have above others, are nevertheless abominable in the sight of God, and as much undone without it, as the meanest of those whom they despise.—On the other hand, there is no room for any to think they may not have it.—Let their sins be ever so many and great, Christ took them all upon himself, and God offers him to them, as their ransom, surety, and peace-maker in his blood.—To *them* this child was born, to *them* this son was given.

My brethren, these are glad tidings to you from the Lord; and would to God they might sound sweetly into all your hearts!—Let me say to every one that hears me this day, "And now why tarriest thou? arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." You were baptized without your knowledge; but for the love of God, make it your own act and deed, now that you are come to years of understanding. You were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins; therefore build not your hopes of acceptance upon any outward advantages, any kind of life, or form of religion, how exact soever, if you never were inwardly stirred up by the knowledge of God and yourselves, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as a gift from him, and your only refuge from the guilt that is upon your souls. Thousands and tens of thousands are lost for ever with a fair character, because they depended upon the outward visible sign, put it in the place of Christ, and would not know a want of him, to cover their sins, and be made the righteousness of God in him.

Neither, if your life is visibly bad, and your sins

notorious, let this thought hinder you from turning to God, that your case is desperate, and your work so great that you know not where to begin it. If it was your own work to satisfy for your sins, and blot them out of God's book, you might well despair.—But in Christ you have full relief from this tormenting thought, and all the encouragement you can desire to come unto God by him. Before you were born, and before the world was made, he was appointed of God to do this great thing for you. And in the fulness of time he came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, to call sinners to repentance, to bear their sins in his own body, to pluck them out of the hands of the devil, to redeem them from death, to make them children of God, and joint heirs with him in his kingdom in heaven. This you cannot but see is evidently a gift, and not man's work, whether saint or sinner; and your heart should leap with joy to think that, whoever you are, it may be your own. And whatever he requires us to do for ourselves, he will enable us to perform by strength from above. For something he does require of all who will be his disciples; and save none but those who come to him for the blessing of a new heart, as well as the forgiveness of their sins, and are willing to be delivered both from the guilt and power of them. That we may not, therefore, mistake our privilege, and reject this gift, let us consider,

IV. The character of those who receive it; signified to us in these words, "the government shall be upon his shoulder," for government implies subjection and obedience in the governed. "The kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of our Lord," and he has all power given him in heaven and earth, to the end he might teach and command us in the name of God, and make us a willing people, living by his rule, and serving him with

freedom of spirit. Do not mistake here, upon the peril of your souls. Christ is not the minister of sin, nor the master of a lawless family. He is not the head of whoremongers and adulterers, of sots and drunkards, of liars, swearers, evil-speakers, and sabbath-breakers, nor of those who live and die in the open breach of any of his commands. To all such he says, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." If the sinner will not be persuaded, but is bent upon pleasing himself, in opposition to the authority and commands of his Lord, let him go on in the ways of his own choosing, and make his damnation sure, by casting the will of God behind his back. But thou who callest thyself a Christian, and lookest for a reward at thy Master's hands, be a faithful follower of him in truth and sincerity, and by professed subjection to him from a pure heart.

My brethren, you know in your own consciences, that the word of God is as full for our holiness under Christ, as the forgiveness of our sins by him; and that you must make a blot of the whole Bible, before you can entertain a thought, that the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, does not teach us "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;" and if we will not be thus taught by it, but make light of this qualification, by refusing to walk with him in the way which all his servants do, we must never "look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ." For the government is upon his shoulder, that we may think ourselves well and happy under it, and receive a full blessing from it, in the duty and loyalty of our hearts to him; and he saves none but those who take him for their Lord and King to reign over them.

All he did and suffered to deliver us from the condemnation of sin, shows the heinous, accursed nature of it, God's abhorrence of it, and vengeance against it, in so strong a light, that we must be blinded to the wish of Satan, and led captive by him at his will, if we do not see the necessity of forsaking it. This then is the character and necessary qualification of all that belong to Christ. If you would be owned by him as his disciples, you must be subject to him in all things, fashioning your hearts and lives continually by the rule of God's word. The love of Christ constrains, the commands of Christ oblige you to obedience. There never was a more prevailing reason offered to the world, there cannot be a stronger bond laid upon the heart of man, for its grateful and willing subjection, than the love of God in giving his Son to die for us, and the love of Christ in offering himself to the stroke of justice in our stead. All, who are rooted and grounded in the faith of this love, feel the force of its drawing; and know what influence it has to keep their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus; to keep them from all evil, in all good. May the Lord get himself a name in this place, by increasing the number of them; show them more and more what a happy privilege it is to be renewed by Christ, to the desire and love of holiness; and to have their souls confirmed in his obedience, as well as refreshed by his peace; what a glorious change it is in our condition, to be enabled, by the power of God's Spirit, to offer him free-will offerings with a holy worship, and to abound in good works to the praise of the glory of his grace.

The "child that was born, the son that was given," to save the souls of his people from death, says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments;" and they know they cannot so much as desire to be freed from their obligations to keep his laws, or take themselves from under his

government, without renouncing their interest in him, and rendering themselves utterly unworthy of his regard. In the belief of the great deliverance he has wrought for them, they come to the blessed sacrament, both to have the pardon of their sins assured and conveyed to them, and to receive strength from it to live as becomes the disciples of the holy Jesus. Whilst those who pretend to believe in him, and yet make no conscience of obeying him, who have not so much as the form and appearance of his religion, and live in the neglect of this his peculiar, sacred command, which is our security for keeping all the rest, can have no hope or expectation of any benefit from him; but, instead thereof, subject themselves to that heavy doom, which he has forewarned them of: "As for these mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."

The Lord open your eyes before it be too late, and draw you to the Saviour in mercy and loving-kindness, that you may rejoice before God in the comfort of these words, and say with one mind, and one mouth, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder." We are thine, O Jesus! bought with thy blood, and thee we will serve. Even so, Lord Jesus, may we all give ourselves to thee, with obedient thankful hearts, for the gift of thyself to us. Take us unto thyself, and take possession of us by thy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father; to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour, praise, and thanksgiving, for ever and ever.

SERMON III.

And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Isaiah, ix. 6.

Our Lord has a great variety of names given him in Scripture, in order to set forth more fully the glory of his person, or explain the nature of our redemption by him. *Jesus* is the Saviour; *Christ* is the Lord's *anointed*, in all his offices of King, Priest, and Prophet; *Immanuel* is God with us, not only in work, power, and mercy, but God in our flesh. He is called "the true God and eternal life," as the restorer of it to mankind when it was lost: the "second man," or "last Adam," with a view to his abolishing the curse brought upon us by the first: the "great Prophet:" the "High Priest of our profession:" "the Prince of the Kings of the earth:" with a multitude of others, above 260, (*See* Frank's *Christus Sacræ Scripturæ Nucleus*, page 234), to denote his Godhead or manhood, his character and offices; and all of them significant of some benefit we receive by him. And here in the text he is called by no less than five names, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." The prophet being directed by the Spirit of God to add one description or character of him after another; no one of them being sufficient to express fully what he is in himself, and all of them intended to raise our expectations of his being to us what he is called: for his names are therefore told us, that we may look for a suitable effect from them in ourselves, and be blessed in every one of them. To the intent you may understand and consider them, and secure your por-

tion in them, I am, with God's help, to open them to you, and may he, who only *can*, open them to all our hearts!

1. The "child which is born, the son which is given us," and which I made the subject of my last discourse, is called *Wonderful*. He is wonderful in his *person, acts,* and *operations*. In his *person,* God and man united; a child weeping in a cradle, and that a mean one, a manger in the stable of an inn; and at the same time waited on as the Lord of heaven and earth by the multitude of the heavenly host: made not only lower than the angels, but debased in his worldly condition beneath the meanest of the sons of men, though he was their Maker, and the Maker of all things, and had all the world at his disposal: the giver of the law, and yet made of a woman, and made under the law, that he might be obedient to it; judged and condemned as a malefactor, himself the Judge of quick and dead: a creature and the Creator, born in time, and taking a body of our flesh to suffer and die, when he was the Son of God, blessed from all eternity. Not having where to lay his head, and lying in the bosom of the Father: the Saviour of mankind, and not saving himself: dwelling among us as bone of our bone, veiling himself in a mortal body, and yet manifesting his glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth: crucified in weakness, when he could have commanded more than twelve legions of angels to deliver him, and had power to raise his dead body from the grave, and ascend with it up into heaven. And as he was thus wonderful in his *person,* uniting in it so many seeming contradictions, we shall find him no less so in his *acts* and *operations,* in his grace and power; not only by a miracle of good-will to us, taking our cause in hand, delivering us from death, and reconciling us to God when we were enemies to him; but also doing it in such a

manner as may justly excite our highest admiration, and entitle him to the name here given him by the prophet.

Sin was to be punished, and the sinners spared. When no other in heaven or earth could do this, he said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God." By covenant with God he put himself in the place of sinners, took their sin and punishment upon himself, and sustained the whole weight of God's vengeance against it in his soul and body. Death was to be suffered, and at the same time abolished. Behold! he whose name is Wonderful did both. He conquered death by dying, and shut himself up in the grave that he might break the bars of that strong prison, rise triumphantly from it, and open a way for all to follow him. Was not this wonderous grace, great love, almighty power? Consider further: he was both the sacrifice and the High-priest; the ransom and the Redeemer; the purchaser of our lives and the price of them; he was made sin, and had no sin; he pleaded as a malefactor at the bar of man's judgment, that man might be acquitted at his own; he was condemned, and gave himself up to his sentence, that, by so doing, he might reverse the sentence of condemnation which was gone out against all flesh; make faith to be righteousness, and mankind, sinners, no sinners. If there is a task more difficult than any that has been mentioned, it is to bend the stubborn will of man; to humble his proud heart, and turn it to God; to persuade us to be happy in the acceptance of his salvation; to create us anew to the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, and prepare us for the heaven he has purchased for all that come unto God by him. And here also he is wonderful in operation: he makes his people willing in the day of his power; works this great change in the minds of believers; fulfils the second character here given of him; and is received into their hearts as the —

2. "Counsellor." You know he never gave, he cannot give up his right to this name. It would be to our unspeakable damage. He is every way qualified for the office of our Counsellor, and he must and will be our Counsellor if ever we have any benefit by him. He has given us his *word* to be our guide, a light to our feet, the star to lead us to saving-knowledge, and is always speaking to us in it. It is his will, declared to us for our direction in points of the greatest concernment, and his heart opened to us for our comfort. He is peculiarly called *the Word*, because he speaks and manifests to the world what would otherwise lie hid in the bosom of God, just as men's words make known their secret intentions. So he is our Counsellor, reveals our duty, discovers the will of God to us with a clear light shining upon it from heaven, shows us the way of happiness, advises and commands us to walk in it, But this is not all: what he teaches and counsels, he moreover enforces with his blood. He has done great things for us, which he would have remembered. We have mighty obligations to hearken to him in every thing he says. He comes close to the heart with this weighty argument in his mouth, "if ye love me, keep my commandments." Surely, I say, in this respect he well deserves the name; and if we have any touch or feeling of gratitude, it will be a prevailing reason with us, and a strong bond upon our souls, to take him for our Counsellor.

And if this is not sufficient, as God knows we are very hard to work upon; if his word, urged home upon us, with his bloody death for our sakes, does not give him the preference to all other counsellors, he has still a farther and most peculiar title to it, in the motions and drawings of his Spirit. He speaks both without and within us, and tries all manner of ways to persuade us to learn of him. He says, Come to me, and at the same time

inclines us to come, and as it were pushes us forward. And though we turn a deaf ear to him day after day, and year after year, he is not, like other counsellors, soon out of patience, but strives on with our untoward wills, stands knocking at the door of our hearts, has his Spirit pleading for him within them, and bringing that voice continually to remembrance which came to him from heaven, "this is my beloved Son, hear ye him." Which we have the more reason to do, because he is,

3. "The Mighty God." This name stands in the midst, and looks backward and forward, giving strength and influence to the two titles which go before, and the other two which follow it. If you ask who it is that is called *Wonderful* and *Counsellor, the Everlasting Father,* and *the Prince of Peace,* the answer is, it is *the Mighty God.* But to give this name a distinct consideration, let us observe, that though the Child and Son, who is said in the former part of the verse to be born and given unto us, is not mentioned by name, yet it can be no other than our Lord Jesus Christ, since no one else that ever was born, not the highest angel if he had come in our nature, could, without blasphemy, be called the Mighty God. And if he is God, as this passage of Scripture undeniably proves, the eternal Son of God, equal in glory and majesty with the Father, then he is to be known and worshipped as God; that, as he himself tells us, "All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father;" binding the duty upon us of giving him the honour due unto his name, by assuring us farther that otherwise our belief and worship of God will be in vain; because, as he also says, "He that honoureth not the Son," with equal adoration according to the foregoing words, "honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." John, v. 23.

But there is, moreover, strong consolation in this name,

and the most solid foundation that can possibly be laid for our faith and trust in him, and the assurance of our consciences, as to the merit and efficacy of all he did and suffered for our salvation. When our eyes are opened by the Spirit of God to see the misery of our condition, and the greatness of our guilt, in the greatness of our sin, it is no such easy matter as unawakened persons may imagine to believe in a pardon. In this case we are generally inclined to fear the worst, in spite of all the encouragement that can be given us. One thing we are sure of, that our condemnation is just; and when once we are persuaded that God is our enemy, we find it exceeding difficult to believe that he can ever be reconciled to such sinners as we know ourselves to be, and are very apt to be pleading against our own relief. Now, therefore, mark it well: hear, thou poor distressed soul, whose fears are always returning, whose doubts nothing can silence, what comfort there is for thee, and for all who believe in this name. Who became thy surety, paid thy debt, and made full satisfaction to justice for thy sin? "The Mighty God." Who shed his blood to redeem thy soul from death? Not a man like thyself, not an angel from heaven — this would not have set thy heart at ease, nor given rest to thy troubled thoughts, — but "the Mighty God." Who was thy sacrifice on earth, and is always thy High-priest in heaven, offering and pleading that blood continually at the throne of grace on thy behalf? "The Mighty God." Who loved us with an everlasting love, and took our nature upon him, that he might bring a perfect righteousness into it, and present it spotless to the Father in his own person for our justification? "The Mighty God." If that word will not banish all our scruples, and stand against all our fears, when we are convinced of sin, and so troubled for it as to be looking out every way for a remedy, I

know not what will. Well might St. Paul tell the Corinthians, whose past sins he mentions, and those none of the least, that they were "washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus;" for he knew a good reason for what he said, and could have told them, as he did the elders of the church of Ephesus, that the blood wherewith they were "purchased was the blood of God;" Acts, xx. 28. When, therefore, we have the grace given us to fly to Christ as a refuge in the day of our distress for sin, you see what cause we have to discharge all our fears, and what ground to rest our souls upon, in that name by which he is here called, and is from everlasting, "the Mighty God:" for we cannot doubt but that his blood is sufficient to purge the most defiled conscience, and wash out the deepest stains of the foulest heart.

When the prophet had thus revealed the Child that was born, the Son that is given unto us, under his highest name and character of Mighty God, we may suppose he might well have stopped; but as he was directed to add two others, we may be sure it was not in vain; and that we shall find farther instruction in his fourth name of

4. "Everlasting Father." But is he not always in Scripture called the Son, as the second person in the Godhead, in distinction from the Father? How comes it to pass, then, that he is here called by a name which does not seem of right to belong to him, viz. "the Everlasting Father?" Why, not in respect of his Godhead, or his place and order in it, but on account of the relation he bears to us in his human nature; and it is worth our while to understand the meaning of this name, and why he is here called by it. We know, by woful experience whose children we are by nature; that we die for the sin of our first parent; are born heirs of his corruption, and

liable to etetnal death; as the root is, so are the branches, so is the fruit, in the course and order of nature. When Adam had brought a curse upon his soul and body by sin, there was a necessity for its being derived to all that sprung from him. When he had lost his true life, the image of God in his soul, he had none to transmit to his posterity; neither can we, by any acts or endeavours of our own, restore it to ourselves, or recover our forfeited inheritance: for this knowledge of ourselves we are beholden to Scripture, and a melancholy account of our condition it is; but, God be thanked, it is not desperate; we learn from thence what we are by one father, let us now see what we may be by another.

Christ says, speaking of himself according to the expression in the text, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given me," Heb. ii. 13. He, then, is the new Father of his people, and stands to them exactly in the same relation for life that Adam did for death. We are clearly told, that as in one all died, so in the other all shall be made alive; 1 Cor. xv. 22. And his name of "Everlasting Father" will help us to conceive the manner how this is done. By being grafted into Christ, the true vine, we, as his branches, are of the same condition with the root and stock, live and bear fruit in him. John, xv. "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." He takes us into the closest union with himself; and when we are so "joined to the Lord," in faith, as to be "one Spirit with him," 1 Cor. vi. 17, our descent is no longer to be reckoned from the first Adam, the author of sin and death, but from Christ, the second Father of us all, in respect of righteousness and life.

The prophet says, "the Everlasting Father;" for so he was in the eternal grant and decree of God before the first man was made; "according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world

began," 2 Tim. i. 9: and in whom we are "begotten again to a lively hope by his resurrection from the dead." 1 Pet. i. 3. You see, therefore, what a precious mystery is contained in his name of "Everlasting Father," and how it is to be unfolded. There is one more name still remaining to be well considered by us; for that he who is called "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father," is also,

5. "The Prince of Peace." The Prince of Peace in his eternal nature of God; the messenger of God's peace to a world of rebels and enemies, and the purchase of it with his blood, moving the heart to seek after it, and sealing it to the conscience by his Spirit; creating a disposition to concord, and universal good-will to men, in every soul where he dwells, from a sense of peace with God, and reigning over obedient subjects, and lovers of peace, when it was a stranger upon earth; and men, by being enemies to God, were at enmity amongst themselves, "living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." He, by the appointment and will of God, took upon himself the office of peace-maker; and when he came down from heaven to put his hand to the work, he was ushered into the world by the multitude of the heavenly host, with the song of praise exactly suited to the great design of his coming, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." Through him God was reconciled to men, and men to God, and to one another. And when he might have come to judge the world, and execute God's vengeance upon it for sin, he came peaceably; yea, as the Prince of Peace, loaded, as I may say, with blessings from above, with the offer of heaven in his hand, and the offer of his help to prepare us for it, and conduct us happily thither. Mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, first met together and kissed each other in his person, and then they could join together

in a league of friendship on our behalf, who had before set them at variance, and divided them as far asunder as the east is from the west.

You know, my brethren, how Christ wrought our peace, and what it cost him: that he offered his soul and body to the stroke of heaven's justice, that we might never feel the dreadful severity of it in our own persons. You know he took up our sins, and took them away, by "nailing them to his cross, so making peace." If you are Christians, by Christian belief and instruction from the Bible, you know that as we were enemies to God by wicked works, he would always have been an enemy to us, and we must have lain for ever under the sentence and curse of the law, if Christ had not been made a curse for us, and established our peace upon sure grounds by the righteousness of his life, and the sufferings of his death. You are told from the mouth of God, and are hearing continually from this place, that "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins;" and that, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And would to God you were rooted and grounded in this peace, valuing it as the treasure of your souls, and all walking with God as dear children in the comfort of it! For I would begin my exhortation from this name, though it is the last-mentioned.

1. Christ offers himself to be known by you under his character of "Prince of Peace." He does not want a name of honour, or an empty title for himself; he would be known to you in the power of it. For his names are all life and power; and he calls upon, and invites you this day to receive and rejoice in the grace and mercy of his peace. Know your want of it; value it, pray for it, hold it fast as your title to the joys of heaven. Do not think to make amends for a broken law, or patch up a deceitful

peace with God, by any works or doings of your own. They are necessary in their time and place; and when you are "God's workmanship, created to them in Christ Jesus," he will make them good works, and know how to reward them: but your first great work is to seek after his peace, knowing that you are undone without it; and to pray for it as a gift from him, which you have not the least shadow of a right or title to in yourselves. If you know not this; if you are not grounded in this faith, and do not pray for God's peace in Christ as for your lives, deceive yourselves no longer. You are not in the way of life. You are not Christians. A smooth, civil life, if it was much better than it is, and with a form of religion added to it, does not make you so. Christ's peace you want, and his peace you must have, or have no peace for ever. It must be all in all to you, gladly received, and welcome to your hearts, as a pardon to one under a sentence of death. Sense of your want of it, and cordial, joyful acceptance of it, is the very thing which proves you believers, and out of the reach of condemnation. It must be the beginning and end of all you do; and if this foundation is not laid in you, whatever else you do, you are building upon the sand, and great will be your disappointment in a day of trial. O Jesus! thou Prince of Peace! glorious is thy name for lost sinners. Have mercy on us, and apply it to our hearts, in all the virtue, strength, and comfort of it.

2. Again, what is Christ to you in his other names? and, if I may be allowed the expression, what use do you put him to? He is *wonderful* in himself, and in all he did and suffered; but do you desire and trust to find him so to you? Working the great miracle of your conversion, freeing you from the guilt and bondage of sin, giving you new wills to fear, to love, to praise God, and

pray to him with the heart. It is a great and marvellous work he has to do in us, but not too great for him whose name is Wonderful, and who, with the same power that he cured all manner of diseases, spoke the boisterous waves into a calm, and raised the dead, can make every one of us say, with joy and wonder, "one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." Look for it at his hands. Let not your unbelief stand in the way of his mighty work. Lord Jesus, work the wonders of thy grace here.

3. Let us renounce our own wisdom as perfect folly, and if we would be well taught, and safely directed in the way of salvation, take Christ for our *Counsellor*. Why does he come to thee, O man! with this name, but because thy happiness is dear to him, and because he only knows what will bring thee to it? Thy own reason is very short-sighted, and, for the most part, at the command of thy perverse will; and, when left to thyself, thou art sure to mistake thy road, and go on blindfold in the way of destruction. Thy Saviour knows this. He knows thy own thoughts and thy own choice would ruin thee, and, therefore, kindly offers to take thee, a weak, ill-judging creature, by the hand, to guide thy soul into all truth, to change the vicious bent of thy affections, and fix thy will in subjection to his unerring commands.

O Jesus! we are by nature "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," and, at the same time, so deluded by the pride of our evil hearts, as to say, "we are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Do thou convince us of it, that we, knowing ourselves in some measure as thou knowest us, may gladly take thy counsel, "to buy of thee gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich; and white raiment that we may be clothed, and that the shame of our nakedness do not

appear; and to anoint our eyes with eye-salve, that we may see:" see good and evil, life and death, and have but one prayer for ourselves, that thou wouldst be to us,

4. "The Mighty God." The God of our help, the God of our hearts, through whom all our mercies are conveyed to us. If this is his name, nature, and essence, let us join with all the angels of God in worshipping him, trust in him, and fly to him as our sanctuary. "Who is this," says Isaiah, when he saw him in the vision or prophecy, "that comes travelling in the greatness of his strength?" The Lord answers him, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." He was perfect in righteousness *as man*, for man; and is "God mighty to save." This it is which gives such a dignity and value to all his acts and sufferings, and is a sure foundation for our hope and confidence in him. Fear not, thou poor worm, trembling sinner, when thy transgressions rise up against thee, and stand as a mountain betwixt thee and thy God; thy faith may remove it. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Though thy sins are more in number than the hairs of thy head, yet thy Redeemer is mighty. His promise stands engaged for thy deliverance; he wants no power to effect it; the blood that was shed for thee is the blood of God. O Jesus! Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, make that blood the sovereign antidote against all the distresses of our consciences; let thy bowels be moved for us; take us into thyself; for thou art also

"The Everlasting Father." We, who by nature, and as descended from Adam, are heirs of sin and death, through grace become members of a new family, of which Christ is the Head and Father, and conveys what he is, righteousness and life, to all his children. Certainly this is a noble privilege, and a most blessed change in our

condition; not less than for a beggar to be taken from the dunghill, and set on a throne, Ps. cxiii. 7, 8. It should be our care to preserve this honourable and happy relation, and endeavour to act up to it; knowing to whom our choicest affections are due, studying to be the true children of Christ in obedience, as well as by adoption and grace, and remembering always that holiness becometh his house for ever. Even so, Lord Jesus, grant we may resolve to be thine, and may be heirs of thy glory.

Thus you see, my brethren, how Christ is made unto us what he is called, and is, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Each of these titles holds forth blessing, happiness, and comfort to us; let us look well to our interest in them. All Christ's names are promises, and signify what he has to do in us; but if we do not put ourselves into his hands for that purpose, we hear them in vain. What remains is, that you take the words of the text for your guide, "to examine yourselves whether you be in the faith?" Make the inquiry, as persons that would not be deceived for the world, with respect to your salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ. Put your hearts to answer the great interesting question, whether you know him in any measure, in his grace, power, and peace, according to the virtue of these names. And may he, who has all power given unto him in heaven and earth, assist and bless you in it. To him, with God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost, the blessed Trinity in Unity, be glory and praise for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON IV.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew, v. 10.

THE righteousness of the Gospel, considered as inherent in ourselves, is very different from what passes for such in common esteem. It is real inward holiness; the renewal of our souls in the image of God; the knowledge and love of God by his own Spirit. It is the full and free surrender of ourselves, our whole state and being, to God in simplicity and sincerity, that he may choose for us, and live in us, and be all in all to us. It is an upright will and an obedient conscience; the sacrifice of the heart, and the mind that was in Christ. It is turning to God from the evil that is in the world, and in our natures, with the whole strength of our will and desires; walking continually in his presence, and giving up ourselves without reserve to his operations. It begins in humility, is rooted in faith, nourished by prayer, perfected by love, and ends in acquaintance and communion with God here, and the everlasting enjoyment of him hereafter. And it is the highest wisdom in man, and the sole end of his creation, thus to "seek after God, if haply he might feel after him and find him;" to turn to him in faith and longing earnest desire; to resign our will to him, and place our affections upon him, that he may flow in upon us with his goodness, and communicate his own happiness to us.

It is the design of this discourse to illustrate the nature of Gospel-righteousness, or true holiness; to contrast it with that which commonly passes for such in the world; to show why the first is persecuted and the last applauded; and then to conclude with a few inferences.

The Bible was written to show us the absolute indispensable necessity of being renewed in the deep ground of our hearts; to teach us the one sole method of being restored to the original dignity and perfection of our natures; to quicken our desires and endeavours after it; to furnish us with all proper helps for it; and especially to caution us against trusting to any expedients or inventions of our own in this great affair, in opposition to the counsel and will of God for our salvation and recovery, so fully declared to us, and so plainly set before us. It acquaints us that the whole state and condition of man, when he first came out of the hands of his Maker, was very different from what it is now: that he stood before God as an angel in paradise, holy and happy, with a capacity of receiving continually new degrees of life and blessing from him: that by withdrawing his heart from him, and foolish imagination of being more perfect and happy independently of him, he fell, as God had told him he would, and as every creature necessarily must do that turns its will and desires from God, into a state of misery, corruption, and death: that, in this sad condition of darkness and alienation from the life of God, he begat children in his own likeness, who are, therefore, the heirs of his sin and weakness; born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards; wearying themselves in a vain pursuit after happiness; and sure never to see the hour when they are at rest, and can say they have what they wish for, because they have that fatal taint in their blood, that aversion to God, and love to the creature, which is the death of their souls, and the essence of misery. That, notwithstanding the dreadful fall of man into this unnatural helpless state of sin and condemnation, the God and Father of mercies did not forsake him, or leave him to perish in it, but took occasion from hence to display the

riches of his nature, and make all his goodness pass before him, by proposing to him a method of recovering all he had lost, by giving him an assurance of pardon, and being received to grace and favour, as if he had never sinned, through faith in a Redeemer. The seed of the woman was promised to bruise the serpent's head; to destroy and break in pieces the dominion which the devil, that crooked serpent, had gotten over the whole race of mankind, by the disobedience and rebellion of their first parents: he was to be our Immanuel, God again with us and in us, to carry us safely through all the stages of our return to God; to purge out our inbred corruptions; to set up the kingdom of heaven in our souls; to bring in everlasting righteousness, and make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. And "to as many as receive him" in faith, and love, and full conviction of their own weakness and wretched unworthiness, "he gives power to become the sons of God;" entering as deeply into their nature as sin had done, and raising up again in them the life and nature of heaven, healing them in his blood, comforting them with his presence, and purifying them by his Spirit.

And as the Bible thus discovers to us the deep ground of our fall, and offers us redemption from it, and calls us to come out of it, so it informs us that if ever we are possessed of our primitive integrity, it must be the gift of God. To stand in the order and will of God; to be in subjection to the Father of our spirits; to receive all his commands with the undisputing simplicity of little children; to love him with all the heart; to delight in him, and long to enjoy him, and forsake all for him: this is as much above the power as it is contrary to the nature of man in his present condition. And whoever thinks he can master his corruptions in his own strength, and restore himself to a capacity of doing the will of God

from the heart, I am confident either never tried, or else he takes a false measure of his state and nature, and brings down his duty to so small a matter, as any man may do, but God will never accept. No! When the awakened soul begins to ask itself, "Can these dry bones live?" it answers at once, "Lord God, thou knowest." It finds by its own experience, and repeated fruitless endeavours after holiness, that our regeneration is the work of an almighty power, and that we can no more restore the image of God to ourselves, now we have lost it, than we could have made ourselves in it at the first; and, therefore, it casts itself wholly upon God, condemned and helpless, praying incessantly for deliverance, and doing all it does in religion to prepare itself for the divine operations. And this, indeed, is a hopeful time, and a happy entrance upon the Gospel state, and "blessed are they who thus hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" with the very thing they hunger and thirst after; with righteousness they shall go on from strength to strength, and from one degree of goodness to another, rejoicing in their progress, as the surest mark of their adoption and acceptance to a share of that perfect righteousness which is treasured up for believers in Christ, and imparted to all those who, by faith, become living members of his body.

But this humility — this self-contempt — this patient waiting for the kingdom of God — this loving faithful obedient spirit — this devotion of the whole man to God — this aspiring after inward holiness by the power of the Holy Ghost — does it meet with fair treatment and a favourable reception in the world? Is it common for men to bid God speed to them who are looking out for a change of their state, and resolve to enter upon a Christian course? To assist them in their resolutions, and pray for grace to imitate them? This would be supposing

human nature to be what it is not—inclined to real goodness, and well pleased to see it prosper in the world. And, accordingly, here is a warning given us, which is more fully expressed in other parts of sacred Scripture; that all such as should endeavour to become more amiable in themselves, and more acceptable to God, by approaching to his nature as near as they could, would be liable at all times to be hated and persecuted by men: not only by the inconsiderate, profligate part of the species, who are ready for any mischief, and from whom no better is to be expected, but by men pretending to religion and the fear of God, and challenging to themselves as high a place in his favour as any, and therefore disdaining to be thought defective, and showing their ill-will to those who would convince them of it, by contempt, calumny, and all manner of ill usage.

Let us, therefore, now see what religion is in the hands of these men. It is the religion of doing no harm. It is, moreover, the religion of doing acts of kindness, generosity, and charity, in proportion to our abilities, and attending regularly upon divine ordinances. And whoever keeps clear of scandalous open sinning, and at the same time maintains a fair character in the world, and preserves a decency in the worship of God, and more especially if he shows a zeal for it, passes in common esteem for a righteous man. And to offer to unsettle such a one,—to put him upon considering the temper of his heart, and examining the ground he stands on; to hint that possibly all may not be well within; that nothing is more common than self-deceit; that the religion of the Bible is different from what it is taken for; and that more goes to the being a Christian than is generally imagined; I say, to call such as these, who are not grossly faulty, and have, moreover, the appearance of many good qualities, to self-examination, would be thought morose and uncharitable.

Perhaps there are not many who ever thought of or desired any other kind of righteousness;—and to talk of any other as necessary to salvation, is censured as running into needless extremes—as being righteous over much—is branded with the hateful names of fanaticism and enthusiasm: but, nevertheless, it lies upon my conscience, and I should be false to my office among you, if I did not endeavour to bring you to the knowledge of the truth, and to warn you against a mistake, which, according to the letter of Scripture, I think to be dangerous; and the more so as it has the general opinion of the world, natural corruption, and the pride of our hearts, on its side.

Now, in the first place, do not think I stand here to vilify civility of manners or a fair carriage in the world, and especially any kind or degree of usefulness. It is the business of all religion to inculcate, improve, and enforce all the virtues that are necessary to the well-being of society. And the more of religion always the more of these. And for any man who is wanting in them to pretend to religion, is an affront to common sense, and the height of impudence. And it is, moreover, the peculiar glory and great excellence of the Christian religion, that it recommends "whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, lovely, and of good report," to the esteem and love of mankind, and contains the best method of bringing us to the practice of them. But, on the other hand, it is urged that religion goes farther than the regulation of the outward man; that there may be a fair show of outward decency, regularity, and sobriety; a peaceable innocent behaviour; a general regard to justice and the law of kindness in our dealings with others; and a strict observation of the outward offices of religion, without any true religion in the heart. Thus far we may go for the sake of ease, convenience,

and reputation; and thus far the heathens could go by the bare light of nature. I wish I could not say that many of them exceeded the generality of those who call themselves Christians, in their lives and conversation. And certain it is, that if the other world was out of the question, and there was no God to bring us to judgment for our actions, it would be ten thousand times better, on all accounts, to be true and just in our dealings, orderly, quiet, and inoffensive in our whole behaviour, than the contrary. But, dear brethren, this is not going to the root of the matter. This is not the religion of the Bible. As yet we are upon the false bottom of our natures. We pretend to build our hopes of salvation upon the Scripture; and yet this is flesh, and not spirit; and they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

One would think that the sacred Scriptures had said enough to decide this point, to bring men to a knowledge of themselves, to convince them of the vanity and insufficiency of all merely human righteousness, and to prevail with them to look out for something better; for are we not there told, that when men are called upon to partake of the blessings of the Gospel, one may go to his farm, and another to his merchandise, and beg to be excused; that they may not be unjust, extortioners, and adulterers; that they may fast twice in the week, and be so very honest as to pay tithes of all they possess, and yet not be justified, i. e. in the favour of God; that they may justify themselves before men (which they cannot do without a fair show of something that looks like goodness), and yet be abominable in the sight of God? and certainly they are so, whatever they may think of themselves, or how highly soever they may be esteemed by others, if they settle with the weight of their souls and the strength of their affections upon the world;—if they are ignorant of that body of death they carry about with

them; the pride, malice, and envy of their hearts; the perpetual strong opposition of their wills and desires to the will and law of God, and their inward total alienation from the life of God;—if they never found so much of their sin as to be pained and humbled under a sense of it; if they never felt the burden of it, so as to cry earnestly to God for deliverance from it, and strength against it;—if they do not give up all their own works as worthless in the sight of God;—if the deep ground of their hearts is untouched, and they do not know their inward want of a Saviour, to atone for their guilt, to dwell in them by his Spirit, and to make even their best works and services acceptable to God: in a word, if they are not endeavouring, wishing, and praying with all their souls to be rooted and grounded in the religion of love—the love of God and man, as the perfection of their natures, the great end of their creation and sole capacity for happiness, the Gospel has no promises or comforts for them; nay, it lies full against them. Whatever they are, they are of and from themselves, and must be left to stand or fall by it for ever: nay, the Bible is so decisive upon these points, and it is so plainly the whole design of it to bring us to the knowledge and belief of them, that if we mistake, it is because we shut our eyes against the light, and do not choose to understand too much of what we seem resolved not to practise.

When the word of God comes with power, declaring the necessity of repentance for *all* in their natural state, and of an hearty deep sense of the unworthiness and insufficiency of our persons and of all our performances; when we see the need of coming to Christ for remission, and living by the faith of the Son of God, and not daring to lift up our heads without an interest in the great atonement; when we hear of putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man, which, after

God, (after the likeness, according to the will, and by the power of God,) is created in righteousness and true holiness, so that we can truly say, Behold all things are become new, and our conversation is in heaven: this comes home to the heart and conscience: this is laying the axe to the root of the tree indeed: this is piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and the joints and marrow. And, therefore, though this repentance and faith, and living by the Spirit of God, is all in all in religion; though it is the very thing we want, and God would gladly give us, and can give us nothing else to make us happy; yet it will go hard but we will put something else in the room of it, and boldly venture all upon it: for, as I said before, a decent worldly life; a behaviour that will entitle us to much esteem and respect from men; generosity, kindness, relieving the poor; a strict performance of the outward duties of religion, and often extraordinary zeal for it, is the image of our own setting up, which we fall down and worship. Be not surprised at my saying this, for St. Paul says more; if we give all our goods to feed the poor and have not charity, a sincere love of God and man, it will profit us nothing; but the spiritual deep-searching religion of Jesus; this mourning and poverty of spirit; this real mean opinion of ourselves, in order to believing and becoming new creatures; this heart-work in religion, we will not come too near it. Surely we may do well, and stand fair with God without it; we will be guilty of no such singularity in religion; we are resolved at any rate to preserve the good opinion of the world.

Where then shall we find a place to set our foot on? which is the truth, and how shall we know when we are safe? Now, if we have read the holy Scriptures to no better purpose than to hazard our souls upon any kind of out-

ward behaviour, whether in religion or our dealings in the world, it has hitherto been a dead letter to us indeed; and I am sure if we have not found our sin in it, we have found nothing else there. But, waiving this at present, I think we have an easy infallible rule here in the text to know which of these two kinds of righteousness is the true; and my design, in pitching upon these words, was to bring it out to observation, as it is a matter in which it greatly concerns us not to be deceived. And I have now brought what I had to say upon it as it were to a point. "Blessed are they," says Christ, "which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." Then, I say, by righteousness here, he does not mean what passes for such in the world; for it never was, nor ever will be, persecuted, and that because it is the righteousness of the world. It has the countenance and favour of the world. The world is altogether on its side; smiles upon it, and pays homage to it; bestows saintship upon it here, and heaven hereafter: and, therefore, unless our blessed Saviour here supposes a case which could never happen to the world's end, that the righteousness of man, of man's own choosing, setting up, priding himself in, and trusting to, could be persecuted by man, this is not the righteousness he is here speaking of. No, it is the amiable, loving religion of the Gospel which strikes at the heart, and comes like fire into the soul, burning and consuming its secret iniquities, that would purge all the venom of the old serpent out of our natures, and lay the foundation of all blessedness in us by faith in the blood shed for us, and given unto us as the principle of a new heavenly life. It is this, I say, which is dreaded, hated, and persecuted—by lies, by calumnies, by hard speeches, and much harder treatment, when the powers of all the world are against it. I do not say that it is *always* necessarily persecuted in all

times, places, and persons, or that persecution is a certain mark of truth; but that man's righteousness *never* is, therefore cannot be the true.

I leave this matter to your serious consideration, and shall only add two or three short exhortations.

1. For God's sake, look well at the Bible; and see whether it does not condemn our whole state, and call upon us to turn from it with abhorrence, and look out for real inward conversion, and restoration from the fall to a life in God. In this view it is the book of all books, consistent and uniform — a storehouse of the most precious interesting knowledge — and comes upon us with a flood of light. In any other, the great design of it will be lost upon us. It will leave us in the darkness and deadness of our natures. We shall but trifle with it, and with our souls, till it brings us to see our death in trespasses and sins, and close heartily with God's method of being recovered from it. The whole amount of our religion will be only that of the young man in the Gospel; and we shall be apt to say in the pride of our hearts, for having kept the commandments as we think, "What lack I yet?"—while God knows we want every thing. And if we have no experience of a working time with God in the depth of our hearts, we are still poor, and blind, and naked, and miserable.

2. Beware of a persecuting spirit. "Take heed," says Christ, "that ye despise not one of these little ones;" those who are little in their own eyes, and enter into a spirit of mourning, and come to Christ to find rest for their souls from the troubles of an awakened conscience, and the power of inbred corruption. What ground is there, I beseech you, in all this, for contempt, hatred, and persecution? And what sort of readers of the Bible are they, who can look upon such with an evil eye, when the most high God says, "To this man will I look" (with

approbation and delight), "even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."—And how truly may it be said in this case, that God seeth not as man seeth! Let this word, then, which so fully sets before us the dreadful guilt of a persecuting temper, make the stoutest tremble; I mean, "whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me," shall discourage them, or lay stumbling blocks in their way, shall do or say any thing to hinder them in their Christian progress,—"it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. If you have come to it by repentance, and there is no other door of entrance into the Gospel state, you cannot much find fault with any one who is coming at it in the same humbling way. If he is mistaken, you will instruct him in meekness, "for the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle towards all men:" knowing that every man must approve himself unto God according to his own conscience, and not according to that of another; that in matters of religion or opinion, ill usage is the most unlikely method to recover men from their errors; that it has power only upon the tongue, and may force men to say what they do not think, but can never reach their wills or consciences.

But, you will say, this preaching and insisting so much upon inward conversion, and the experience of a new life by the power of faith, is condemning all others. *So it is;* if they are not converted, else why is it preached? And so do the sacred Scriptures condemn them. Repent, or perish! And for any to be provoked at it, and run into a spirit of bitterness against it, is a strong sign that they neither are converted, nor at present care to think of it. They may put in a loud claim to true religion, but,

like the false mother, they had rather take up with a dead half of it, than see it all given alive to the right owner.

3. Let those who suffer according to the will of God, commit their souls unto him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake," i. e. who, when they are persecuted for the sake of Christ and his Gospel, patiently endure it, and love and bless their persecutors; taking the cross, whatever it is, as their due, and a means of their purification, and praying, after the example of Christ, for the conversion of those who are the instruments in God's hands of bringing it upon them: for, otherwise, "if we give our bodies to be burnt, and have not this charity, it will profit us nothing. "Blessed are they, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They are translated into the kingdom and family of God here, washed by the blood of his Son, and brought under the power of his Spirit, and joint heirs with Christ of that kingdom of everlasting blessedness in heaven, which God hath prepared for them that love him. There they shall join in the universal song of the triumphant church, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation, and people."

Lastly; Though the righteousness I have been chiefly speaking of in this discourse, viz. inward holiness and purity of heart, is so necessary a part of our Christianity that without it no man shall see the Lord; yet we must not so think of it, or trust in it, as if it was the ground of our final acceptance with God. When we have done all we can, and God has done all in us and for us that he ever will do, we are still unprofitable servants, and can

be accepted only in the Beloved: for "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." First and last, our whole salvation is of him; our pardon, our holiness, our acceptance. Let it for ever humble us to think we are such unworthy weak creatures, and have so much imperfection still cleaving to our best performances, even in the highest state of grace we shall ever arrive at, that we must at no rate abide by the merit of them, or venture our salvation upon them, but receive all from God as a gift, and be saved by the righteousness of another. And, above all, let the infinite love of God, giving his Son to die for us, and to be our righteousness, win over all the powers of our souls to his service, that we may be holy as he is holy, and perfect as he is perfect. Let us not sin because grace hath so abounded. God forbid we should ever make that a handle for licentiousness or carnal security, which, in its own nature, is of all others the sweetest allurement, the strongest tie upon our souls, to devote ourselves to God in every kind and every degree of holiness! But let us watch evermore, and pray without ceasing, that we may "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," and endeavour all we can to recommend our faith to the esteem of others by the blessed fruits of it; that when they see our good works, our resignation, our meekness, our love, they may glorify our Father which is in heaven by their own conversion. And to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end! Amen.

SERMON V.

Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. Gal. iii. 10.

I AM frequently endeavouring to set before you the evil of sin, and the divine indignation against it; and though much has been already said to you on this humbling subject, I would urge it still further; for it is a matter in which we are very hard of belief, though all is connected with it—our return to God and acceptance of Christ, our final salvation or eternal misery. It is the ground-work of Scripture, and if it does not lay this foundation in us, let us say what we will, we do not believe it. We are naturally in the depth of sin, sold under sin, love it, and live in it; and if we are not thoroughly persuaded of its deadly nature, and the justice of God in the punishment of it, we shall never be prepared for his mercy. If we think we need not fear, let us live as we please, or that the threatenings of Scripture are nothing but an empty sound, its call to repentance will, of course, be slighted, and we shall never once think of putting ourselves in the way of forgiveness.

My design at present is to set before you that part of the service for Ash-Wednesday, in which we are reminded of the curses in Scripture against impenitent sinners, and to make some observations upon them for your farther conviction and instruction in this great and weighty point: and I do it the rather, because you will not come to hear them when they are appointed to be read. Who knows but they may reach you now? Who can tell whether God may not have a blessing for you in his curses? I am

sure they are intended in mercy for this very end; and if they should make your ears tingle, and your hearts tremble this day, you will have cause to bless God for them all your lives. I beseech you attend to them, and I pray God give you the right understanding of them.

"Cursed is the man that maketh any carved or molten image to worship it, Deut. xxvii. 15.—Cursed is he that curseth his father and mother, ver. 16.—Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's land-mark, ver. 17.—Cursed is he that maketh the blind to go out of his way, ver. 18.—Cursed is he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, the fatherless, and widow, ver. 19.—Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbour secretly, ver. 24.—Cursed is he that lieth with his neighbour's wife, Lev. xx. 10.—Cursed is he that taketh reward to slay the innocent, Deut. xxvii. 25.—Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, and taketh man for his defence, and in his heart goeth from the Lord, Jer. xvii. 5.—Cursed are the unmerciful, fornicators, and adulterers, covetous persons, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards, and extortioners, Matt. xxv. 41. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10."

1. Let me observe to you, that if there are any other sins besides those here set down, as doubtless there are, they must likewise be taken into the account, and all have the same sentence passed upon them. The sins here particularly mentioned, are chiefly sins against the second table, or sins against our neighbour, and not all those neither. Here is little said of sins against the first table, or sins against God; which, though they are not so scandalous in the eyes of the world, and but lightly regarded by ourselves, are as heinous in the sight of God as any other. Here is nothing said of sins of omission; which we have reason to dread and condemn ourselves for as much as any, both because we must give

as strict an account of them, and because we have more of them, and sooner forget them, so that they cannot easily be called back by a particular repentance. The duties you omitted, perhaps but the very last sabbath, are by this time quite slipt out of your minds, never to be thought of again, though God keeps a book of remembrance of them. If you were not at church morning and afternoon, he knows it. He knows whether you then sat down to read the Scriptures; whether day by day you think of your souls, pray in secret, and with your families, and train up your children and servants in the way they should go. He knows what works of mercy and charity, and many other things, you might have done, and did not. All these, I say, sins against God, and sins of omission, must be added to the catalogue of those which have now been repeated to you; for you will be fatally deceived if you judge yourselves by a short rule, or leave any thing that is in God's table of sins out of your own account.

2. Observe and understand, that the meaning of the curse you have heard is not that it belongs only to those who are guilty of all or many of the sins here mentioned, but of any one of them. It would be strange, indeed, if any man should be guilty of them all; and at this rate there would hardly be a sinner in the world. But take care how you think and judge in this matter; for St. James tells us, that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," James, ii. 10; and that because it is the law of God, whose authority binds the whole and every part of it upon us, and extends alike to every command; for otherwise the law would cease to be a rule, and no command of God be in force, as such, where a power is assumed of disputing or dispensing with any. From this mistake wickedness abounds in the world; one

man pleading an exemption from one command, and another from another, and every man indulging himself in his beloved vice, to the subversion of all order, and exclusion of the divine government. You are not a *murderer*, nor an *adulterer*, nor a *thief*; then you will not be condemned as such. But if you are *unmerciful*, or a *slanderer*, or a *drunkard*, or a *sabbath-breaker*, or a *profane swearer*, or a *covetous worldling*, or *trust in any thing you have more than God*, or live *in opposition to his law* in any one respect, what can you have to say why judgment should not pass upon you according to that law? and how will you ever be able to clear yourselves of the curse which belongs to the particular sins you are guilty of? I would not be understood to speak of the principle of sin in believers, or any transgressions they may happen to fall into, and repent of; which they do as sure as they are believers, humbling themselves before God for sins of constitution, surprise, or infirmity, which others would think and call *venial*, and living with allowance *in none*. But here lies the danger; and what I am observing and insisting upon is, that one sin indulged, pleaded for, and therefore unrepented of, is inconsistent with a Christian state, and will shut the door of mercy against you as well as more. To which I add, that in all our searchings for sin, we shall take a false measure of it, and totally mistake the truth of our condition, if we do not look at the heart, where God looks, and pass judgment there, as Christ has directed us to do. Matt. v.

3. Let us ask ourselves the question, whose curses do we hear? The curse of him *who can*, and in case of stubborn disobedience, will, "destroy both body and soul in hell." They are the positive declarations of the just and holy God against sin and sinners; and they are delivered in the form of curses to express the certainty

of them, and strike the greater terror into us. For you are not to suppose that God's cursing is like man's, or that there is any thing of the weakness of passion in it; but he curses that we may consider what we have to do, and how we venture upon sin, when he has declared his displeasure against it, and his will to punish it, in so solemn and awful a manner. When he swears by himself, "as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," we can take comfort from thence, if we repent and turn to him, and think ourselves more safe because of his oath: so when he pronounces the doom of sin in the form of a curse, we should dread it the more on that account, and take warning from the severity of his threatenings to escape them. Assure yourselves, God does not curse in the manner you think of when you hear that word; but he thereby publishes to the world the accursed nature of sin, his eternal abhorrence of it, and determination to punish it. Neither do you make the curses of Scripture your own in the bad sense of the word, by hearing them repeated, and saying *Amen* to them, and much less are you required to do it in a cursing disposition: but what you do is declaring your belief of them on the testimony of God's word, and if you do not believe them, you must not pretend to believe the Bible. And know for certain that they are the words of God, who cannot lie, whether you believe them or not, and always in force against all obstinate and impenitent sinners: and I cannot think that you take the way to avoid them by keeping yourselves out of the way of hearing of them. Let them strike deep into your souls now; and think with yourselves what you can do against God, or what power you have to stop the course of Almighty justice. Stop the course of the sun, keep off sickness from your bodies: he has decreed that you shall die; say to him, you will

not; do something or other to show that you can control him, before you bid defiance to him, and provoke his displeasure. You know you cannot; and, however you may fight against him with your sins, you cannot possibly entertain a thought of resisting him by open force. Then stand in awe of his threatenings, fear his curses, and think only of this one thing, how to secure yourselves against them.

Nay, there is something in this matter still more dreadful and alarming than any thing I have yet said; namely, that whenever you commit any one sin, the curse of it belongs to you; from that moment the decree is gone out against you, that very sin must be punished; you have pulled that sentence upon your heads, "the soul that sinneth shall die," and must lie under it for ever, for any thing you can do to help yourselves. I do not say there is no hope in the case, or that you are lost for ever without remedy; but help must come to you by another hand, and it must also come in a way of satisfaction to justice, which you have not in your power. There is a debt to pay, and you are cast into prison for it, and can by no means come out thence till the last farthing of it is paid. How this is done every Christian knows, and I will not forget to tell you before I conclude. In the meantime let this observation have its due weight with you, that the curses you have heard out of Scripture are God's, and that he will say *Amen* to them, whether man does or not.

4. Let it be observed that the curses of God against impenitent sinners will be executed upon them chiefly in another world, and that the whole weight and power of his wrath cannot be known till after death. We may feel the effects of his displeasure, and doubtless do, in pain and sickness, crosses and calamities of various kinds. And whenever his hand is heavy upon us in any kind of

trouble, we should learn from Scripture to know the author, and consider the design of it. Then is the time, if ever, to make deep search into ourselves, and ask why God does this? And as sure as we ask the question sincerely, we shall find the answer to it in our sin. For God afflicts for nothing else but to bring it to our remembrance, to chastise, humble, and correct us, and turn us out of the road of destruction; and we suffer like beasts, and not like reasonable creatures, or Christians who have the history of providence before us in the Bible, if we do not consider what is laid upon us as the desert and punishment of our sin, and the means of preventing much greater sufferings to come.

It is true, when troubles come thick upon us, we have not a prophet, or a messenger sent from heaven, on purpose to tell us what we have done, or what God is doing with us; we need it not; the Scripture tells us once for all, and we should tell it faithfully to ourselves, *it is for sin;* and one great design of Scripture is to teach us that God is always the same, and will deal with mankind at all times according to the methods of his providence therein recorded, as the unalterable purpose of his will, and a perpetual warning to us of the great evil and necessary consequence of sin, viz. eternal death. For that is the curse of all God's curses, the true import and full meaning of them all; and I am now particularly observing to you, that nothing we suffer in this life can discharge us from it, if we die in our sins.

The 90th Psalm is entitled *a Prayer of Moses*, and supposed to have been delivered by him at that melancholy time when all the Israelites, who came out of Egypt, of twenty years old and upward, except Joshua and Caleb, died in the wilderness, above forty in a day for forty years together. Many of them might repent and save their souls; but if they did not, the death of

of great joy to your ears; just as comfortable as it would be to a condemned criminal to have a pardon brought him when the halter was about his neck. It is my delight, as well as my office among you, to tell you of the precious things of Christ; of deliverance from wrath by him; of redemption from every curse; of the full and free pardon of all your sins, only by his blood-shedding; and it is my great desire, before I die, to see you crying after him, as the blind, the lame, the lepers did when he was upon earth, every one of you for your own healing; but how can this be while you think yourselves whole, fear no evil, and do not know your want of such a Physician? How can you ever come to him for a pardon, if you do not see the condemnation you are under, and find the sentence of death in yourselves? You must, you must come to this; this is your awakening, the Spirit's first work in you, and the way to Christ, the Saviour of sinners. I must therefore be faithful to you here, upon the peril of my own soul. I must tell you of sin, what a depth of evil there is in it, far beyond what you could ever have thought of, and what a depth of sin there is in *you:* and when you know and feel it by grace given you from above, see your danger, and the curse which cleaves to it, Oh! how will you rejoice to hear those words, "Thou shalt not die;" to have your pardon confirmed beyond all doubt by a thousand promises of Scripture, and mercy as it were forcing itself upon your hearts; to see Christ paying the vast debt you owed, and bearing the heavy load of your sins in his own body; and to know assuredly that the forgiveness of all sins is sealed in his blood to every believer for ever.

And when you have faith in the pardoning love of God, and come to it in the way of repentance, see the desert of sin, and the greatness of your own, the great mercy of your deliverance, and how dearly it was pur-

chased for you, what will you do then? Will you keep your sin? Will you continue to rebel against such goodness? Will not the love which has done such great things for you kindle one spark of love to the Author of it in your own breasts? It cannot be: you would think it great baseness to be ungrateful to the person who had saved your life, and scorn any man who should charge you with it. And if Christ, who, by the will of God, became a curse for you, to deliver you from the curse of the law, and to save you from the everlasting destruction of soul and body, has no tie upon you, no love, no gratitude, no obedience from you, it is evident at once that you set no value upon what he has done, if you can be supposed to believe it at all, and, whatever you pretend, have no experience of a work of grace. He is your ran som, your peace, your life; and if you are his, the curses of God can no more fall upon you than they can now upon him: but a bleeding, dying soul, and a proud, stubborn heart, are ill matched; and if you will not come to him in humility, as lost and ruined in yourselves for pardon and deliverance, and with desire to have the strength of sin subdued in you, he will not be mocked; he knows what is in your hearts, and that you come to him with a lie in your mouths when you call him your Saviour. Therefore know your condition; believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that ye may be saved; make proof of your faith and knowledge.

Know your condition. Know that you are fallen creatures, sinners against God, condemned and helpless, and that if you have not been stirred up to seek mercy from the Lord, sin with its curse lieth at your door. I do not pretend to say what measure of trouble for sin is necessary. It may be more or less, as God pleases; and he knows best how to suit himself to every one's case. A little of it may be as effectual in some, to bring

them to the acknowledgment of the truth, and a change of their state, as a great deal of it in others; but such a sense of the danger and misery of sin, and of the greatness of their own, there must be in all, as is sufficient to bring them in repentance before God, and make deliverance from it welcome.

And when you are thus prepared for your remedy, fear not to take it. Take it without delay, the very moment you know you want it, and do not stand poring upon your sins, to keep you from it. There is but one way of dealing with them, one cure for them, one method of giving ease to the conscience; and that is not any thing you can do. The word of your peace is, "believe in Christ." Believe that he only could take away the guilt and curse of your sin, and that he has done it; for one of these without the other will give no relief to your souls. It can signify nothing to you that Christ is the Saviour of sinners, or that all the world is saved by him, if you do not trust in the grace and merit of his death for yourselves, worship God, and do all your works in the faith and comfort of it.

There is a pretty figure, or speaking picture, of the deliverance he has wrought for us, in a passage of Leviticus, chap. xiv. When any man's plague of leprosy was healed, and he was to be cleansed by the priest, two live birds were to be brought; one of which was to be killed, and the living bird dipt in the blood of it, and then let fly, to signify the escape of a sinner from a worse plague than that of leprosy. And many other ceremonies the Jews had by divine appointment, to foreshow and be figures of atonement by the blood of Christ. But we have great reason to be thankful that we live at a time when Christ, the substance of them all, is come, and the Spirit given to testify of him, and work faith in us; for they were but dark preaching in comparison of the

light of the New Testament. Receive it, and rejoice in it; and when you are convinced of sin, and looking out for help, never be so much your own enemy as to doubt of God's will to receive you to an interest in Christ, till you can show the place of Scripture where you are excluded by name. I say, do not thus wrong your own souls; but when you are so far truly awakened as to say, "what shall I do to be saved?" take the answer of Scripture into your hearts, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts, xvi. 31. Think greatly of the power of Christ, the riches of his grace, and will to save you; think how urgent your case is, what a curse is lying upon you if Christ does not take it off, what mercy is offered you, how you are invited and commanded to accept of it, and that your not accepting it in faith and thankfulness to God, is one of the greatest sins you can be guilty of; and this, with the blessing of God upon your prayers, will put an end to all your unbelieving fears. Sin is frightful when it rises up before the conscience in all its guilt and odiousness; and too many are apt to plead for months and years against their relief, as if their sin was too great to be forgiven; but that one saying is a full answer to all their doubts, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" The Lord establish you in the Gospel of his grace, and enable every one of you to say joyfully for yourselves, "blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

Finally, make full proof of your faith and knowledge of Christ to yourselves and others. Let the mercy, which saves, rule you. You must not think for the world that you belong to Christ, if you do not sincerely purpose and endeavour, as God shall enable you, to live unto him. We could not remove the curse from ourselves by payment to justice; that is Christ's work,

and not ours; and it is a vain thought in any man to suppose he can atone for his sins by any works of his own. But if Christ has done it for us, and saved us from the wrath of God by his death, surely we have great obligations to him, and should be ready to do any thing at his bidding; especially, as he requires nothing of us but what is for our good, what he himself calls our *full* joy, and would make us all as happy as we can be in this world, if it was universally put in practice. Meekness and lowliness, patience and forgiveness of injuries, not in word only, but from the heart, sobriety and purity, diligence and faithfulness in our callings, quietness in our families, truth and uprightness in our dealings, love of God and man, these are the works of faith, and the pleasant fruits of the Spirit, and would make the earth a paradise.

Let us, then, attend to the voice which came from heaven, "this is my beloved Son, hear him;" as we shall, if we love him, and truly believe that he is our Saviour from sin, death, and hell. If our faith is a true spiritual work, beginning in repentance, sorrow for sin, and a sense of our being undone by it, and then casting us upon Christ for help and deliverance, it will carry us on to obedience: it will make us devout worshippers of God in public and private, pure in heart, and holy in all manner of conversation. And without this we can have no other proof to give of our being in a state of salvation. Faith we must have, and make it our refuge against the curse of the law; but St. James will say to us, in agreement with all Scripture, "show it by thy works." We may value ourselves upon our baptism, Christian name, and the slight performance of some outward acts of religion; but without a life of godliness, honesty, sobriety, diligence, peaceableness, and brotherly kindness, we know not what it is to be Christians, we are no better than baptized heathens, and must not persuade ourselves that

we are in the way to heaven. The word of God which abideth for ever is, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and we are renewed unto holiness when we unfeignedly receive all his commands, and keep close to him in prayer for strength to do his will. So believe and so do, and then faith hath its perfect work, and you may say boldly on the warrant of all Scripture, "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

SERMON VI.

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.

NOTHING can be more distressing to the soul than the apprehension of God's displeasure, and the fear of being given up to it without remedy, after death. And if God is just, and man is sinful, there is but too much ground for that fear; every one's conscience must be haunted with it more or less, and relief from it will be desirable and welcome, in proportion to the burden we feel, and the judgment we dread. It is therefore a delightful employment to those who are awakened to a sense of their condition in sin, and seeking after deliverance from it, to search the Scripture, in order to know as exactly as possible by what means, and in what way, they are restored to the favour of God, and the hope of eternal life. And when the eyes of their understanding are enlightened, to see the salvation therein revealed; the fulness and excellence of it, how great it is in itself, and how suitable to the wants of perishing sinners, they receive it thankfully at the hands of God, endeavour to

their bodies was not the whole of their punishment, any more than the fire which fell upon the men of Sodom was the last they were to feel. When the traitor Judas reflected on his guilt in selling his Master, he had such a hell in his bosom, that he could find no relief but in putting an end to his life: but, nevertheless, it is said, "He went to his own place." Oh! that dreadful place! Oh! that heavy word, "His own place!" For it is every impenitent sinner's *own*, as it were by right of purchase, but certainly by the just judgment of God; and he must go to it as naturally and necessarily as the flame mounts upward, or a stone falls to the ground. There, I say, is the curse of sin, and what you should ever keep in mind and lay to heart. We feel the plague of it in part in the troubles and sorrows of this world, in one loss after another of what is most dear to us, in the pains, sicknesses, and death of the body; but "the second death, in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," the everlasting death of the soul, that is the power of God's wrath. Think what a sad thing it is to have our portion of it both in this life and the next, to feel it in some measure now, and lie under the weight of it for ever.

Now, seeing that sin is so abominable in the sight of God, the object of his heavy displeasure, and we have such warning from him of the destruction it will bring upon us, why do we fear it so little; why is it as nothing in our eyes; why do we generally live and die in it? It must be for one of these reasons, either you do not see your sin, or if you cannot wholly deny it, as it is impossible you should in great and plain cases, you deny or extenuate the guilt of it, and fly to the mercy of God in opposition to his justice: but whatever your blindness is owing to, whether it is ignorance of your sin, or disbelief of the word of God, great is your danger, and as yet you are in no condition to make use of the one sole

remedy of God's providing for sinners. I now tell you that Christ is that remedy; and I pray God prepare you for it by self-knowledge, and the belief of Scripture.

Let us look back a little, and consider what has been said: sins, both of omission and commission, we have innumerable, and the sentence upon all and every one of them, according to the law of God, is death. His curses are the declarations of his will to execute judgment upon us for the transgression of his law, and "he is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent," nor does he want power to effect his purposes. And again, his threatenings, though they take place oftener in this world than we imagine, yet relate chiefly to the eternal punishments of another. Alas! what shall we do in this extremity? What method can we find out of ourselves to escape his wrath, or where shall we go with our guilty souls? Go where you will with them, and do what you will for them, it is all in vain till you know that you are lost and undone in yourselves, and turn your eyes to "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," yours and mine, and the sin of every man that shall be saved; *that Lamb of God*, and *nothing else*. If your "head were waters," according to the prophet's wish, Jer. ix. 1. and your "eyes a fountain of tears," to weep day and night, they would not wash away the guilt of one single sin. If it is but one, *death* it must have; and the blood which is to pay the price and redeem you from the curse of it, must be the blood of the Son of God.

You would, perhaps, stand amazed to hear of God's curses against sin; feel a strange uneasiness within yourselves while I was speaking of them, and would rather that I should preach smooth things to you than bring them to your remembrance. Indeed, my brethren, I think I do preach smooth things, and bring glad tidings

its power not only to kill the body, but to torment the soul after death, and give both soul and body up to eternal punishment in hell?

II. We must take notice of what is here farther told us, "that the strength of sin is the law."

And when once we are made duly sensible of our misery and helplessness, knowing that we all have that sin in us which is the sting of death, and stand condemned by the righteous sentence of the law, we shall see the great blessing and benefit of a Redeemer, cast a longing eye towards "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" and,

III. Understand what reason we have to say with the apostle, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. We are here told, that "the sting of death is sin." Sin is the cause of death, and of all the calamities, pains, and sicknesses which lead to it. Sin brought death upon Adam, and all his posterity. For it is not, as some fancy, in contradiction to the Bible, that there must be somewhere such a world of imperfection and suffering as this, in their imaginary scale of being; but mankind have broken the law of their creation, and brought evil upon themselves by a voluntary defection from the will of their Maker. Death was not the original design and appointment of God. He did not make death, nor us for it; and we may venture to affirm, that if there never had been sin in the world, there neither would have been death, nor suffering of any kind. A breathless corpse never would have been seen; a diseased body, bowed down to the earth, and broken with its infirmities, never would have been known; and when we follow

husband or wife, child or dear relation to the grave, when we feel the approach of our own dissolution, and know that one hour more will close our eyes in the darkness of death, we know too the reason of all this misery and sorrow in the world of a good God; it is sin. But then this is not all; we must carry our thoughts still farther. For though sin puts a sting in the hand of death to kill our bodies, and lay them in the dust, yet its desperate malignity does not stop there. The venom of it reaches to the soul, and is death to our better and immortal part; not by destroying it, but by separating it from God, who is its true life, preparing it for, and consigning it to the horrors of the second death. And this is indeed the sharpness of death's sting, what makes it painful and terrible to think of; and what we may suppose the apostle principally intends, when he says, "the sting of death is sin." Not meaning that all do in fact dread death alike on this account; for many make a mock at sin; many have but faint and weak apprehensions at the best of the great evil of it, and they are but few in comparison who are awakened to a sense of their guilt and danger. But what you are to observe and understand from the words is, that St. Paul informs us by direction from the Spirit of God that it is so, whether men think of it or not; and that therefore you must come full into this belief, whatever the reason of your minds may suggest to the contrary, not only that sin brought death into the world, but that it will follow us out of it, and its curse be chiefly felt in another. For otherwise, death might more easily be submitted to; and if we did not fear it on account of its consequences, and the unknown state it gives us up to, it would in the main be a harmless thing, rather a falling asleep, than the sore evil we now think it; and desirable to many as their release from the pains and sorrows of a wearisome life. But alas!

it conveys them to much greater, if they are not prevented; and when the Scripture says, "the soul that sinneth shall die;" it cannot be understood that sinners shall die only to this world, for that we know is unavoidable, let us live as we please; but die eternally.

Will you think of this? Will you see what a curse there is in that sin which sleeps so quietly in your bosoms, and gives so little disturbance to your consciences? Do you not hear it in every passing-bell? Do you never bestow a serious reflection on the mischiefs of it continually spread before your eyes, in disappointments and losses, in bodily accidents, pains, and sicknesses, in war, plague, famine, earthquakes, and other grievous judgments, in the death of thousands every day, and the certainty of your own? And would you know what sin is, why it is so deadly, and has such power to ruin us, to destroy the peace of our lives, to drown the world as it once did with a flood, to set it on fire as it will at the end of time, to reduce the bodies of all that ever lived in it to dust, to rise with us out of our graves, and be our everlasting plague, if we die with the guilt of it upon us? Are you set down in this belief, and does the affirmation of an apostle, that "the sting of death is sin," gain your full assent?

II. Then hear and understand that "the strength of sin is the law."

The law, or will of God, however made known to us; whether as written in our hearts, and discovered by the light of natural reason, or revealed to us in Scripture; that law which we confess ourselves bound to, and ask mercy for having broken, if we know what we mean when we say at the end of every one of the commandments, "Lord, have mercy on us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." And it is the strength of sin, or gives it power to

destroy us, by discovering and defining it, forewarning us of the danger of it, and in case of transgression accusing us in the name of God, and condemning without mercy: not only for the outward gross acts of sin, downright murder, adultery, false swearing, &c.; but by tracing all sin up to the heart, and finding us guilty there to God, though perhaps we may be able to justify ourselves before men.

If we clear ourselves of all guilt upon this ground, and stand upon our innocence, because we have a tolerably fair appearance in the eye of the world, and men like ourselves can lay nothing to our charge, we shall be fatally deceived. For you must be well aware that the law has an inward, spiritual meaning, and must be understood in its whole extent, as Christ has taught us to explain it, Matt. v. Insomuch that malice, hatred, scornful anger, is murder; the lustful eye is adultery; not putting our whole trust in God, not bearing an inward, profound reverence to his holy name in our hearts, are breaches of the second and third commandments, in the intention of the law, and in the sight of God; and so of all the rest.

This, I say, is a point which we should thoroughly understand, and be well grounded in, lest we mistake our condition altogether; as we certainly shall, if we mistake the rule by which it is to be tried. There are many persons who from natural goodness of temper, civility of manners, worldly prudence, and what is called decent pride, or sense of reputation, can acquit themselves in the main of scandalous, open sin, at the same time that perhaps they are guilty of the breach of every one of the commandments; because they do not go to the full extent of them, do not keep them as unto God, but only to men, and never consider them as reaching the heart and all its motions. And from hence it comes

to pass that so little account is generally made of the remedy of God's providing for sin, of the necessity of humbling ourselves before him in repentance, and suing out our pardon in the name of Christ; which is utterly impossible till we see ourselves in the light of condemned malefactors, by bringing both heart and life to the touch-stone of the law, as considered in its full, spiritual meaning, and acknowledging the justice of its sentence.

But perhaps you will think this is hard measure, considering the corruption and weakness of mankind, and be ready to require a reason why the law of God should be not only so exceeding broad, but inexorably strict and severe. The answer to which is, "Who art thou that repliest against God?" Surely, his authority is reason sufficient in the case to all who own it, and believe his word; and you cannot but be sensible of the extreme danger of resisting, or questioning it. Try what you can do against him in other respects; whether you can command rain, and fruitful seasons; whether you can preserve yourselves in health, and free from all accidents; whether you can stop the raging of a fever, or keep the breath in your bodies when God commands it out of them: I say, try this first, see if you can control his will in any one instance, before you venture a whole eternity upon your opposition to it. Never be so foolish as to say, this sin is little, or that command is hard; but remember, and lay it to heart, that the will of God is the law to which all his creatures are bound, and must of all necessity take place, whether we see the fitness of it or not, or however we may presume to dispute it. But, nevertheless, let reason be judge. God says, do this, and live; transgress, and die: the apostle says, this "law is the strength of sin," and gives it power to condemn, ruin and destroy us. Because if God gives a law to mankind, it must not only be with design to be obeyed,

but to execute the penalty annexed to it in case of transgression. For otherwise it could have no force and virtue as a law, but would in effect destroy itself. And if you suppose that the case is different where the law is in God's hands, and that you may presume upon a mitigation of the severity of it on that account, you argue just the wrong way, and make that a plea for disobedience, which should in all reason deter you from it. For his truth and justice are infinite as himself, and the danger of opposing his authority so much the greater because he *is* God, because he cannot lie nor repent, and has power to "destroy both soul and body in hell." So Christ teaches us to reason in the point, Matt. x. 28. And if you will still be pleading against the will of your Maker, and the necessity of an absolute submission to it on pain of his utmost displeasure; if you will take the liberty to "call evil good, and good evil," just as you please; or allow yourselves in the practice of any one known sin, upon a presumption that he will not put his threatenings in execution, consider well, I beseech you, what you are doing. For what is this but prescribing a rule to God, taking the law into your own hands, and setting yourselves above him? What would become of his authority in the world, what reverence would be paid to it, what reason could there be for his calling men to repentance, if we were allowed to entertain a secret belief that his law might be broken with impunity in any one instance? What bounds, do you think, would men set to themselves, or where would they stop in sinning, if they could once have any the least ground to persuade themselves that there is no danger in transgressing the bounds which God has set them?

But, besides what has been said, it may be farther considered, that as the happiness of all intelligent creatures arises from, and is founded in their union with the

will of God, and can possibly be founded in nothing else; so it is necessary that his will should be made known to them, by a law of his giving, as the means or instrument of that union. And it is likewise evident, that when such a law is given, the certain consequence of breaking it must be misery and ruin to the creature; unless it is supposed that there can be any such thing in nature as happiness contrary to God's idea of it, and in opposition to his will. What the law in heaven is to the blessed angels, you will not expect that I should tell you; but that they have one, may reasonably be concluded from the fall of some of them, occasioned by their rebellion against God, and defection from his will, in some manner declared to them under the form of law. It was not therefore the effect of arbitrary will in God, nor intended merely for a trial of Adam's obedience, that he had a law delivered him to keep as soon as he was brought into being; but because he could not be happy so much as for one moment without a free choice of the only sovereign and blessed will, and full subjection to it. A law then he must have, or be left to make a happiness for himself in some way of his own contriving independently of God, which we may venture to affirm again is impossible.

And what I am now observing will help us to account for some difficulties in the history of the fall, as delivered by Moses. If it should be asked, why did God give the first man a law, foreseeing the breach of it, and the misery that would follow? the reason now appears to be, that there was an absolute necessity for it, and that God could provide no other happiness for him but that of his own will. If it should be asked, why that law, seemingly so frivolous, was not to eat of a certain tree? the answer is, that it was as much a test of his subjection, and dependence on God, whose prerogative to know good and evil, or be the fountain of light and knowledge

to his creatures, was sufficiently intimated to him in the name of the tree, as any other would have been that we know of; and likewise that it could not be a prohibition of any of those crimes which now abound in the world, murder, adultery, theft, evil-speaking, covetousness, &c. because in Paradise he had no temptation to them. If it should be asked again, why death, especially death spiritual, which we now have chiefly in view, was the penalty of transgression? it may be replied, that the very act, and every act of transgression, necessarily and in its own nature, by breaking off the will from God, is death to the soul, as much as a sword in the heart is the death of the body; and that therefore Adam lost his true life, and could not but die as to God and happiness, in the very day of his sin. I say, it appears from hence that neither angels nor men can be without a law, as it is the only method in which the will of God can be declared to them, and conformity to his will is the sole means of their happiness. We may presume that otherwise God would not have intrusted us with the dangerous liberty of choosing life or death, and put it in our power to be miserable; but we now see that life and death are necessarily linked together, and that the very possibility of happiness arises out of that liberty. And from hence too we may observe, with much self-abasement, and melancholy reflection on the corruption of our present state, that there can be no such thing as unmixed happiness in a world of sinful creatures. Well would it be for us, if we would qualify ourselves for the little of it that is to be had upon earth, by coming as near to the will of God as we can; and spend all our days in a continual preparation and patient waiting for that blessed time, when there will be no more pain nor suffering, because our natures will then be perfectly purged from all evil. Upon the whole, the account of the sin and fall of man is a

very instructive and awakening point of revelation. St. Paul had it strongly impressed upon his mind in the whole chapter preceding the text; and with a lively, piercing sense of the fatal consequence of disobeying the will of God in that instance, affirms concerning every other, that "the sting of death is sin," and that "the strength of sin is the law," as being given us of God to be kept on pain of death in the full extent of the word, death temporal and eternal.

Be not therefore deceived. Sin is not the harmless thing you think it: it is death. Adultery is death, stealing is death, drunkenness is death, evil-speaking is death. The breach of all and every one of the commandments, spiritually understood, and as reaching the heart, is certain death. The law gives sin power to kill, and cannot be broken. It is the law of Heaven, and the justice of Heaven ratifies its sentence. Adam found it so; Christ found it so; every awakened soul finds it so, bears witness to the righteous judgment of the law, trembles for its guilt, and has the sentence of death in itself. On this dreadful point of time we all stand before God, whether you will believe it or not, condemned by his law as sinners, and ready for the stroke of justice: and what can save us from it, who shall work our deliverance? I must not withhold your comfort from you. I must tell you from the word of truth what it is that must support our spirits, and bear us up against the fear of condemnation. You think the law is strict, do not love to hear of death for sin, and call it hard preaching. Why, in the nature and reason of the thing it must be strict. It cannot bend to the will of man. We are not at liberty to choose whether we will obey it or not. If it denounces death for sin, death it must have. But at the same time that we declare this to you, it is to prepare you for your remedy; and if you will hear me, I

have now glad tidings to declare to you, in the name of the Lord, and in the words of his apostle.

III. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Lord, help here; grant us a right understanding of this point, that our souls may bless thee for the mercy of our redemption, and rejoice in thy salvation.

Do you hear? there is a victory obtained, but not by us. It is just as the words sound. The victory is not ours, but Christ's; gained by him for us, and given to us, and the glory of it is all his own. Our good hearts, and good meanings, our best repentance, best works, best prayers, best sincerity, have nothing to do here. They neither had nor can have any share in the victory here spoken of; and we are in danger of losing the benefit of it, if we make them our trust, or put them in the place of Christ. The apostle's exhortation to be immoveably steadfast, and "always abounding in the work of the Lord," will have its due weight with all believers, and shall be offered to your consideration in its place and order. But however we abound in it, or whatever we do for ourselves, it is not the victory we want; and you must carefully observe that the strength of the apostle's inference for steadfastness in the work we have to do under Christ, lies in this, viz. that we proceed in it upon sure grounds, as knowing first, from what Christ has done for us, that "our labour will not be in vain in the Lord." For in vain it must have been, if he by taking our nature upon him had not redeemed it from the curse of the fall, and carried it triumphantly through all the stages of its recovery, performed a spotless obedience in it, suffered death upon the cross for the sin of it, raised it from the grave, ascended into heaven, and sat down with it at the right hand of God. What are we

thinking of, and how shameful is our ignorance of all Scripture, of God, of the accursed nature of sin, of the necessity of Christ's atonement for it, and the great difficulty of the work which the Father gave him to do, when we take it out of his hands, or proudly challenge any share of it to ourselves! He could say, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." He said, what neither men nor angels could, "It is finished." And blessed be God that he did say it; for it would daunt the stoutest heart upon earth to think that there is no hope of salvation, nor means of reconciliation with God, but by doing what he did, and what must of all necessity be done. That satisfaction might be made to the justice of God, the penalty of sin was to be suffered; if we had endured it in our own persons, it must have been for ever in hell. The law, that it might no longer be the strength of sin, and give it power to destroy us, was to be vindicated, and made honourable in the sight of men and angels, by being fulfilled in every jot and tittle of it. Adam's curse was to be revoked; the devil's head was to be bruised, and his power destroyed; death was to be conquered, heaven was to be opened, and all believers to sit down in it, clothed with a perfect righteousness. Whose work, whose might, whose glory was all this? Could you do these things, or any one of them? Why, we are condemned men and women, born under a sentence of death for the sin of our first parents, and have made it our desert ten thousand times over by our own personal transgressions of the holy law of God. Can we, I say, whose souls are forfeited to the law, stop the course of justice, buy our pardon, and procure a right to eternal glory by any repentings, humblings, or good deeds of our own? We, who are both corrupt and disabled, always weak and always sinners, and if we were not already under a sentence of condemnation, sure to deserve it every day of

our lives; can we justify ourselves to God, and challenge heaven in our own right? Never call yourselves believers in Christ, till you know better what he has done for you, and how much it cost to redeem your souls. Never talk of your own doings, your own power or holiness, when sin is to be atoned, when the law is to have its due of a perfect obedience from you, when justice is to be made your friend, when Satan is to give up his right in you, when the grave is to be opened, when every dust of your bodies is to be brought together again and kindled into life, and soul and body to be presented holy to God, and fit to enter into heaven. Never think that all or any part of this is to be done by man, for we could as soon make a world. Neither deceive yourselves with fancying, as too many do, that what Christ has chiefly done for us, was to make salvation-work more easy than it was before, and that therefore the performance of it will be looked for at our hands. I beseech you understand; He has made salvation both possible and easy to sinners, by doing and suffering in our stead what we could not; and our salvation now depends on the condition of believing that we could not do it, and that he did. You must not stand before God in a lie, you must not pretend that you are clean from all spot of sin in yourselves, you must not entertain a thought of being your own saviours; but if you would have peace with God, if you would be comforted, if you would be in a way of doing what *is* required of you, turn to a better hope, and say with an humble, steadfast faith, and great rejoicing in the conscience, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Consider the chapter of which these words are the conclusion, and see on what ground the belief of a resurrection to eternal life is established, and by whose victory it is that we attain to this hope.

So early as the apostles' days some called in question the resurrection of the dead. But St. Paul says, in answer to this, "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen," ver. 13. How is that? Why could not he have risen, whether any others do or not? And how does it follow that because he rose again, there must necessarily be a resurrection of the dead? Why, because he did not rise for himself, but for believers; their resurrection being included in his; and that they, as parts or members of his body, might be partakers of his victory over death, be "quickened together with him, raised together, and with him sit together in heavenly places," as the Scripture expressly assures us they do, Eph. ii. 5, 6. So that his resurrection was the resurrection of all who belong to him; and as sure as they died in Adam, so surely in Christ, their second Father, shall they all be made alive; his rising as the first-fruits being a certain proof and pledge of a general harvest to follow in its time and order.

Now, can it be made a question whether this great salvation is of grace or of debt, of Christ or of man? Whether it was the work and contrivance of the blessed Trinity in mercy to lost mankind, or possible to be effected by any power, will, or righteousness of our own? "Who is this," saith the prophet, "that cometh travelling in the greatness of his strength?" Isaiah, lxiii. 1. Will you answer and say, It is I, I myself, "mighty to save?" Oh! lie down in the dust. Know your guilt; confess your desert; abhor yourselves. Let Him who can, let *grace* save you. Understand what it is that distinguisheth the religion of the Gospel from all others, and is the chief ground of our rejoicing before God. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, "our hope," 1 Tim. i. 1, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30. It is not that

hereby we attain to such a righteousness of our own as will satisfy the law, and take out the sting of death; but because we have heard Christ himself saying, "This is the work of God," what he requires at our hands, and without which nothing that we do will be accepted,—"that ye believe in him whom he hath sent;" John, vi. 29; sent from the bowels of his mercy to do what no other could, to redeem us from the curse of the law, to ransom us from the grave, to exalt us to a place at God's right hand, by bearing our sins in his own body on the cross, offering up a spotless righteousness to God on our behalf, and communicating the merit of all he did and suffered to those who, with an humble faith and a deep sense of their unworthiness, lay their sins on his head, and fly to him as their only refuge from condemnation. Look for comfort and sure footing where you will, you will never find it but in this great article of our religion, that Christ is given to us of God to save us from the curse and ruin of our sin, and be our Father for life, as Adam was for death. Whatever we do is so defective, that we can place no confidence in it; and we shall always be in a state of the most distressing uncertainty, till we can say boldly, in the faith of the great salvation which has been wrought for us, "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ:" "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you;" 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. I say, let us stand fast upon this ground, and receive mercy as mercy.

If God has manifested the riches of his nature in behalf of a lost world, and will be known of us as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, receiving us to

a covenant of life and peace in him, let us not entertain a doubt of his gracious intention, so fully declared, so strongly recommended to our belief, so strangely confirmed and sealed to us, not only by his word, but oath, and the blood of his Son. Let us never forget it, let us not fly to other expedients, nor build our hopes of acceptance to the reward of eternal life on any other foundation than that of his grace and purpose in Christ Jesus, when it is so exactly suited to our case, and the very thing we want. Let us not defeat it, nor lose our interest in it, by robbing him of his glory, as we do by a proud conceit of ourselves. If there is any thing more astonishing than the goodness of God in the redemption of sinners, it is the presumption of man in taking any share of it to himself.

What farther remains to be said, and must of all necessity be pressed upon you, and brought home to your consciences, is the use and improvement we are to make of Christ's victory, by taking him for our Lord the King to reign over us, unfeigned submission to his teaching, and living up to our faith.

Suppose now a person awakened to a sense of his condition, and convinced of the exceeding sinfulness, great danger, and plague of sin; that he sees nothing but ruin and misery before him, and that if the wages of sin at all times is death, he must perish for ever, without help or hope in himself; that in this extremity he hears Christ preached as sent of God to work his deliverance, to make full satisfaction to justice, to bear the punishment of his sin, to fulfil the law in his stead, to die for him, to rise from the dead for him, to ascend into heaven, and take possession of it for him; and that whenever he turns to God in repentance, and with an humble faith accepts the Lord Jesus Christ for his Saviour, he shall be entitled to all the benefits of his victory over sin, death,

and hell: I say, suppose a person so awakened, so convinced, so believing, seeing such a curse in sin, such a glory in Christ, such riches of grace in God; and what, do you think, would be the ruling desire, and settled temper of his heart? Would it be to slight and run the hazard of losing, or to keep the mercy he has gotten? Would it be to continue in rebellion against God, or study to make him some suitable returns of gratitude? Would it be to turn back to his former state, at the same time that he sees the guilt, the danger, the damnation of it, and is rejoicing in the mercy of deliverance from it? Behold here, therefore, the natural effect and proper working of faith in the pardoning love of God through Christ Jesus, its happy influence on practice, what advantage it gives us for the reformation of our lives, and how sweetly it engages the believing soul to obedience, from a gracious principle of love!

It was a moving word which God spake concerning Israel, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel? My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy; for I am God, and not man;" Hos. xi. 8, 9. This, I say, was a loud call to a hardened people to repent, and intended, as every display of the divine compassion is, to melt down their stubborn natures. But how much more gloriously was the love of God manifested, in giving his Son to die for a sinful, rebellious world! And what can kindle our love, and bind us in a sacred bond of grateful, willing subjection to him, if this does not? What can convince us more effectually of the heinous, accursed nature of sin, of God's vengeance against it, and will to punish it, what can give us a greater abhorrence of it, than the very method of our deliverance from it, by the death and sacrifice of Christ? If we

could not make our peace with God, if nothing but the blood of Christ could wash out the foul stains of our sin, how great is the pollution of it, how great was our danger, and how certain will be our doom if we continue in it!

May the ever blessed Spirit, who only can, enable you to consider and apply these Gospel arguments for your return to God in love and obedience! May he make the Lord Jesus precious to us in his whole salvation, and get the victory in us, as Christ has gotten it for us; that "in all things we may be conquerors through him that loved us," and prove the truth and excellence of our religion by the purity of our lives! O soul, if God forgiveth all thy sin, let him heal all thy infirmities. If the bowels of God were moved for thee, if the blood of God was shed for thy redemption, if thou art saved beyond thy deserts, and far beyond all thy hopes, be faithful to his word and truth, be faithful to thyself. Now hear the apostle's inference from the doctrine of Christ's victory, and let it come to thee in the name of God. "Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." It is the call of his love to thy heart, and strictly bound upon thee by his command; it is the way in which all his people walk with him; it is the proof of thy discipleship; thy reward will be according to thy progress in holiness, and the want of it will give thee up to condemnation, and be the sting of death in thee for ever. The Scripture is so full and plain for a lively, faithful obedience, that whatever disputes there are concerning the ground of our salvation, whether it is by faith or works, or partly one and partly the other, there can be none about the necessity of our returning to God in repentance, and cleaving to him in sincerity for the purification of our hearts. Grace hath abounded to us, and great mercy hath been shown us from the Lord; but, let us pretend what we will, is never believed, and cannot possibly be received by us, till we are

persuaded that the recovery of our hearts and wills to God in holiness is a necessary and very precious part of it. You must not think that you are Christians, because you have been baptized, and are called by that name; no, not though you come to church and sacraments: you may do this for credit's sake, and more from form, or custom, than the preparation of the heart, and real desire of spiritual blessings; but if you would be owned by Christ as his disciples and friends, the knowledge of a sinful, condemned state must bring you to him for salvation from it, with a will to forsake all sin, and live by his rule, as God shall enable you. These are the two great parts of his religion, faith in him as the Saviour, making our peace with God, in opposition to the conceit of any work, merit, or righteousness of our own, and faithful, pure obedience springing from it. "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." For whoever does, it is at the peril of his soul, and all his hopes. Faith saves all that are saved, but cannot save the lawless and disobedient, because they have none. It is the nature and essence of a true faith to work by love, and keep the commandments; that is, with sincerity of endeavour, all of them in heart, will, and purpose, though none perfectly; and the more it improves in obedience, the quicker it is to spy defects, and always ready to mourn over them. If our faith cannot stand this test, it can stand none. "If the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, does not teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;" Tit. ii. 11, 12; if we are not convinced of the necessity of striving against all sin, and endeavouring to perfect holiness in the fear of God; we may be as sure our faith is false as that the Gospel is true.

Let us then first see the exceeding great evil of sin, and the death to which it subjects us, in the glass of

Christ's sufferings, that we may be thankful to God for sending him into the world to save us from it, and show our gratitude to him in the way he requires of us, by returning to our duty, and praying with the heart that his will may be done in earth as it is in heaven. Let us make Christ the strength of our salvation, and he will be our strength for obedience. Let "the law," doing its office in condemning us, be "our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" for deliverance from it as a covenant, and he will bring us back again to the law, with hearty liking to it as a rule, and with all possible advantage for performance. Know your misery, know your helplessness, think how God loved you, and what Christ has done for you; get your hearts warmed with a sense of redeeming mercy, and it will be the fire of love in them, constrain you to live to him, and make your obedience a free-will offering to God for Christ's sake. What he said of the woman who anointed his feet, and washed them with her tears, "she loved much, because much was forgiven her," will be true of every soul which has felt the sting of sin, believes it to be death, comes to Christ for life, and thanks God for his victory. By the help of the same Spirit which convinced it of sin, it will be humble, it will be fearful of offending, it will hold fast its hope, it will go on from strength to strength in the way of holiness, and by the peace of God which rules in it be kept in all good, from all evil.

The Lord grant that we may so "build up ourselves on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life," Jude, xx. 21. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, one blessed God in Trinity, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON VII.

But who regardeth the power of thy wrath? for even thereafter as a man feareth, so is thy displeasure. Psalm xc. 11.

You are often hearing these words in the course of the Psalms and burial service, and it would be your wisdom to lay them to heart. The displeasure of God! the power of his wrath! who can think of, and believe it, without desiring to avoid it, and using all possible means to secure himself from it? If it is a man like ourselves, we do not willingly provoke his wrath. If it is one who has a right to command us, and power to make us feel the effects of his displeasure, we are cautious of offending him; especially if we have great obligations to him, and are more particularly bound not to offend and displease him. On all these accounts God is very greatly to be feared; for since he is our Maker, Preserver, and continual Benefactor, requires our obedience, has an unquestionable right to it, and can severely punish in case of disobedience, we should dread nothing so much as to offend him, and desire nothing so much as his favour. But, nevertheless, we know, by woful experience, that this is not the nature and character of man. We see in others, and may feel in ourselves, that the Most High God, notwithstanding the right of his authority, the justice of his government, the greatness of his power, and the countless sum of his benefits, is not thought of in the world with reverence and godly fear. We provoke him daily to his face, and, as it were, bid defiance to him with our sins. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not con-

sider," Isaiah, i. 3; neither Israel then, nor those who are called Christians now. The sun knoweth his time of rising and setting; winds and storms obey him; the sea is bound to its place by a perpetual decree; all the creatures he has made fulfil his word, are subject to his will, and publish his praise by keeping to the order he has established, except men and devils. With them we are associates and confederates in rebellion against him; and, to the shame and reproach of our nature, it is here recorded in the book of truth, that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that the imagination of the thoughts of his heart,"—as he was then fallen, and we are now,—"was only evil continually," Gen. vi. 5. What should be the reason of this dreadful contempt of God? Why do we thus go on from youth to old age, one generation after another, in spite of his sovereign authority, just government, uncontrollable power, and most sacred commands, to set up our own wills against him? It is because men do not, will not know him. Men foolishly and wickedly suppose that the God who made the heavens and the earth is regardless of what passes in the world, or that he is all mercy, and will not punish according to his threatenings. See, I say, whether this thought does not lie at the root of your disobedience, and harden you in an evil way. Whatever you pretend, you do not believe his wrath, and therefore it is no wonder you do not fear it. "Who," saith the Psalmist, "regardeth the power of thy wrath?" meaning that the generality make but little account of it; but that, notwithstanding, it is exceeding dreadful, and that those who set themselves in earnest to consider and regard it, can hardly come up to the height of it in thought and imagination; "for even, thereafter as a man feareth, so is thy displeasure," that is, not less than his fears, let them be ever so great. For the transgression of the law of God

is sin; and "the wages of sin is death," even death eternal. This is the clear and positive declaration of Scripture, to be received and believed with undoubting persuasion on the testimony and word of God. And one great end of Scripture is to reveal him to us as just and holy, the hater and avenger of sin, that we may not so presume upon his mercy, as to be fearless of his judgments, and that we may be prepared for that mercy of God in Jesus Christ which we all want, by a penitent acknowledgment of our vileness and condemnation in sin, and a hearty purpose to renounce and forsake it. For then we shall see another meaning in the text. It says, that "thereafter as a man feareth, so is thy displeasure," that is, according as we do or do not fear, consider, and lay to heart, the power of God's wrath, we shall be liable to, or avoid it; by not fearing we shall feel the whole weight of it, and our godly fear will as certainly prevent it. I shall, therefore, speak of the words in both these senses:

I. As the express declaration of a wrath in God, equal to, if not far exceeding, any thing we can think or conceive of it; and,

II. As pointing out to us the way to escape it.

I. The text tells us of a wrath in God, the power of his wrath, a mighty wrath, terrible as all our fears of it can be, or rather far beyond any thing we can think or conceive. Not that there is any such passion of wrath, anger, or fury in God, as we mean by these words, and too often feel in ourselves. You are not so to understand the word wrath, when it is spoken of God. So far as it is attended with trouble, vexation, and torment, it can have no place in the blessed, holy nature of God, and would be contrary to the everlasting, full enjoyment of himself. But his wrath means the effect of his justice, or righteous

dealing with us, and its falling so heavy upon us as if it proceeded from the most furious anger; and the word is used to strike an awe upon our spirits, and that we may so fear as never to feel it. Alas! we do not. For "who regardeth the power of thy wrath?" Who can form a just conception of it if he would, and how many never consider it at all, or utterly disbelieve it! Whatever they do, however they live, though plain commands are broken, and plain duties neglected, they flatter themselves that God regardeth it not, and has no will to punish them. Mercy we all know there is in God, and are but too apt to think there is nothing else; insomuch, that without the light of Scripture, we should never have come to the right knowledge of this great important point of his justice, from the effects of it called his wrath. To the Scripture then let us go. For one great end of its being written and put into our hands, I told you, was, that we might know the nature of the God with whom we have to do; and ground our belief of him, not on any blind reasonings, or vain fancies of our own, as we generally do, but on the infallible revelation he has made of himself. The great points which it brings to our knowledge, are the entrance of sin into the world, God's righteous vengeance against it, and the one, sole method of deliverance from the curse of it by Jesus Christ; but the last of these, or the way and means of our deliverance, though it is the comfort, glad tidings, and great glory of the Bible, can neither be believed nor understood, if we are not first well grounded in what it declares to us of the great evil and heinous nature of sin, and God's displeasure, the text says, "the power of his wrath," against us for it. And for our full assurance in this matter, and to cause it to make the stronger impression upon our minds, the accursed nature of sin, and God's hatred of it, are not only declared in words, but delivered to mankind in the

form of a history, copied, as it were, from the records of heaven, or a publication of God's secret counsels, and differing, in this respect, materially and most remarkably from all other histories; to the end that, reading his judgments against sin, in various instances, in every age of the world, we might see the seal put to his justice, know from what he has done what he will do, believe and dread his threatenings from the actual execution of them, and never presume upon his mercy in opposition to his word. The point, therefore, is God's wrath, or punishment of sin; for I suppose I need not tell you that he judges and punishes for nothing else. Let us see what information the Scripture gives us concerning it.

The first account of this kind, and almost the first thing we meet with in Scripture, is the sin and punishment of Adam. God had said to him, "in the day thou eatest thereof," transgressest the command which has been given thee, "thou shalt surely die," that is, forfeit the covenant of life which has been granted to thee, all right and title to a blessed immortality. And, accordingly, by doing this one forbidden act, he came under the law of death, and with him all his posterity. Now, if it was possible for God to alter his purpose, or act contrary to his threatenings in any case, this was the time; if ever there was a sin in the world which called for mercy, and required an abatement in the rigour of justice, it was that one first sin of the first parents of mankind, because all their unborn children were to be involved in the consequence of it. But, behold! it could not be. Stop here, O man! consider this awful transaction with deep attention, and know that eternal justice must have its course. The sentence, so far as it related to the death of the body, we know took place against them,

and that it will continue in force against every son and daughter of theirs to the end of the world. We may know too, if we please, from the wretched state of corruption and weakness we are in, that the death of the body was not the whole, nor the worst part of their sentence; but the soul, by departing from God, and God's departure from it, lost its true life, and must have been separated from him for ever in the horrors of the second death, without satisfaction made to justice, and recovery to his favour by the grace and power of a Redeemer. And it is farther worthy of observation, that there is little else recorded in Scripture of the history of our first parents, than that they sinned, were turned out of Paradise, and died; to the end we might be sure to take notice of it, and have nothing else to draw off our attention from the truth of God in his threatenings, the accursed nature of sin, and his strict and terrible justice in the punishment of it. If there was not another instance besides this in all Scripture of God's judgments upon sin and sinners, this alone is enough to make us tremble, and sufficient warning to the world of the deadly nature of sin, and the curse it brings us under; since we all feel it in the burdens, calamities, and sorrows of life, in our subjection to death, with all the pains and sicknesses which lead to it; and not least in the sickness and corruption of the soul, its perpetual, stubborn opposition to the will of God, in self-seeking, and self-pleasing, impotence to good, and strong propensity to evil. But the Bible has line upon line for us on this head, and warning upon warning of the wrath or justice of God, as exemplified in the punishment of sin. This instruction runs particularly through the whole of the Old Testament; is, as it were, the "flaming sword to keep the way of the tree of life," and will be an eternal bar to it, if

some mighty hand does not again open an entrance into Paradise for mankind, dead in trespasses and sins, and fallen under a sentence of condemnation.

Consider next the universal deluge; when "God saw that all flesh had corrupted his way before him, and the earth was filled with violence," Gen. vi. 11—13. Noah preached to them for an hundred and twenty years, both in the very action of his building the ark, and also by warnings and exhortations from his mouth, to put them in fear, and persuade them to avert the judgment hanging over their heads; but when they would not be instructed, "the flood came and swept them all away." Here, you see, was wrath indeed, and the power of wrath. We scarce live a year without hearing of great calamities in some part of the world or other, plague, famine, earthquakes, the miseries of war, and distress of various kinds; but what are all these put together to that great destruction which was then brought upon the earth?

And though God has promised, for reasons well known to himself, never to destroy the earth again in like manner, that is, universally by the waters of a flood, yet there is no change in his nature and will; he is the same sin-hating, sin-avenging God, for ever and ever. Of which we have another remarkable instance in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, upon which "the Lord rained brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." The reason of which great and terrible destruction we are not left to guess at, but plainly told it was "because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great, and because their sin was very grievous," Gen. xviii. 20.

So we read of God's giving up the seven nations of Canaan to be destroyed, when "their iniquities were

full," and of the sore plagues which he sent upon Pharaoh and his servants for the hardness of their hearts. But much the greatest part of the Old Testament is taken up with the history of God's own people, the Jews; of whom we read that God delivered them up to their enemies, and sent other judgments upon them, whenever they rebelled against him. And it seems as if they were singled out on purpose to be standing examples, not only of the great and general corruption of mankind under the fall, since, notwithstanding the many divine interpositions in their favour, the signal manifestations of God to them, and their superior knowledge of him and his law, they continued a disobedient and gainsaying people; but also to be monuments of God's wrath upon sinners; which fell heavy, indeed, upon them at the last, when their city, Jerusalem, was destroyed, and the whole nation banished from their country, as they are to this day.

I do but just mention these things, and it may be sufficient to show what I mean, namely, that God will be true to his word, and can be very severe in his punishments. It is true, the examples of God's judgments recorded in Scripture are only examples of his wrath falling upon sinners in this world: and how can it be otherwise? For the punishments of the other are yet to come; of them we can have no account or history, and I pray God we may never know them. You are not, therefore, to suppose that the sufferings we read of in Scripture are the whole punishment of sin, and the whole power of God's wrath against sinners. You must not think that the souls of those who perished in the flood were drowned with their bodies, or that the men of Sodom are not to "suffer the vengeance of eternal fire." But the use you are to make of these examples is this, that they are full confirmations of the certainty of God's

threatenings; and that what we are told of the power of his wrath, in the dreadful torments of another world, will as certainly be executed as the other upon all those who die impenitent and ungodly. I beseech you, disregard them not. See in these examples, which the word of truth holds up to you, who God is, what sin is, and what you are to look for at his hands, if you will not learn from thence to stand in awe of him. Know that "sin when it is finished," by the full consent of the will or actual commission, "bringeth forth death," Jam. i. 15. Death is the certain consequence and necessary effect of it, as the birth of an animal, or the springing of a plant is, from its proper seed in the course of nature; and if Adam had not died upon eating the forbidden fruit, or any soul which sinneth should not come under the law of death, this would be as contrary to the order which God has established, as if no production of things in the world was to follow from their proper causes. The apostle's similitude and expression, of death from sin by a birth, should not pass unnoticed.

But there is one instance in Scripture of God's wrath still more awakening than all the rest, and that is the sufferings of Christ. My brethren, how certain, how terrible is his justice, how powerful is his wrath beyond all conception, when it calls to the "sword to awake against the man that is his fellow;" Zech. xiii. 7. And what would have been the doom of a world of sinners, if Christ had not borne the whole weight of it for us! What can we think from thence, but that "on whomsoever that stone shall fall it will grind him to powder," if we do not see in his death the desert and punishment of sin, and take warning from it to flee from the wrath to come! Blessed be God that we may, that we have such a refuge provided for us, that he suffered in our stead to save us

from eternal misery, and that if we are taught by him to fear God, we need not fear his displeasure.

II. For I told you that the words of the text may also be understood in this sense; namely, that regarding, considering, and laying to heart the power of God's wrath, is the way to escape it. If we so fear God as to keep his commandments, and depart from evil, we are sure as his word can make us, that through Christ we shall be entitled to his blessing and favour. When our Lord says, "Fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to destroy both soul and body in hell," Matt. x. 28; he means that if we do fear him, we are in no danger of that dreadful, eternal fire; which is, indeed, the sting of God's displeasure, and the very power of his wrath, and what you may suppose the Psalmist chiefly meant by saying, "Who knoweth it?" Settle it, therefore, in your minds, that there is no possible way to avoid coming into that place of torments without a religious reverence and fear of God, and conscientious regard to his commandments. And do not deceive yourselves with thinking that you have any lively, steadfast fear of God in your hearts, when you observe only some of his commands, and not others. For a true fear of God will incline you to pay an equal regard to them all; and if you obey any one of them upon right grounds, and from a true principle, because it is God's will and command, you will think yourselves bound, for the same reason, to obey every other. You do not commit adultery; you do not steal; you are not a drunkard; you do not bid defiance to God with your oaths and curses; but do you love your neighbour as yourself, so as never to defraud, or injure, or impose upon him in a great matter or a small; never to speak or report any evil of him, unless it be to answer some good end? Do

you love, or desire to love God, or ever so much as think of loving him with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength, according to the first and great commandment? *First* and *great* are Christ's words; but, to our shame be it observed, what is first in God's esteem, and therefore great in the reason of the thing, is last and least in man's; and if we can acquit ourselves to men, in some tolerable degree, with respect to the laws of the second table, we make but little account of the first. Let me ask farther, do you keep your sabbaths holy to the Lord; not only by a customary attendance on the service of the church, but by keeping your thoughts close to the business of the day, drawing off your minds from other things, and spending it upon your souls, in a godly thoughtfulness, in the reading of Scripture, and other religious exercises? And the heart, where God more especially lays his command, and keeps a watchful eye upon it, is that looked to? See now what the amount is of all your fear of God. When his commands do not much thwart your interest or inclinations, you have no quarrel against him or them; in other plain cases you set him at nought, and trample upon his laws.

My brethren, this is not the way to avoid the displeasure of Almighty God, but fearlessness and contempt of his wrath. If we would not have it fall heavy upon us, we must be governed by an uniform, conscientious fear of him, in every action of our lives, in every thought of our hearts, without the least reserve or exception to any one of his commands. And happy it is for us that, sinners as we are, we have a way to escape; and that God himself, "according to the good pleasure of his will, and to the praise of the glory of his grace," has provided the means of our safety, and removed all our fears of his displeasure, if we do but turn to him

in repentance, and continue sincere with him in our obedience.

Can you be beforehand with me in what I am to say next? Are you so rooted and grounded in the faith of the Gospel, that when you hear of God's displeasure against us for sin, and the power of his wrath, you can turn your thoughts at once to Christ, see all your security in him, and bless God for him? Indeed, my brethren, if we have not the grace given us to look upon Christ crucified as our only remedy, we have great cause to fear; we know nothing as we ought, neither God, nor sin, nor ourselves; neither the greatness of his love, nor the greatness of his anger. If we do not see the power of his wrath, as it fell upon Christ, and take our estimate of it from thence, we have not yet learned to fear it. For in the height of his mercy we read the depth of his justice; and the power of his wrath is fully discovered to us in the manner of our deliverance from it. God would spare us, but he cannot deny himself; and therefore Christ must bear the stroke of his indignation, and be given up to death for our offences. And would to God we might see the desert of them in his sufferings, and be in fear for ourselves from a due consideration of the way in which forgiveness comes to us. If there was no other way or means for sinful man to be reconciled to God, and escape his wrath, but by Christ's pouring out his blood upon the cross for the redemption of our transgressions, this is an opening of hell to us as well as of heaven; and herein we have full warning of the curse that will fall upon us, if we do not prevent the danger hanging over our heads, by our repentance and godly fear, and acceptance of mercy.

We are apt to entertain false notions, and have weak apprehensions of the wrath or justice of God, and, from

the power of sin in us, are very slow to believe it; but if it had not been satisfied by the death of his Son, we must have felt the power of it for ever in our own persons; and the saying of the text, "thereafter as a man feareth, so is thy displeasure,"—that is, God will not be displeased with us if we do truly fear him,—could never have been verified, if Christ had not delivered us from all fear of his displeasure, by being made a curse for us. It is a great word for sinners to hear, "fear not, neither be discouraged;" but if we belong to Christ, we may speak it assuredly to ourselves; for it is the glory and great comfort of the Gospel, that "mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, can meet together" in the person of Jesus Christ, and justice have its course in his sufferings, without our punishment. The Old Testament is the book of God's wrath, and the record of his judgments upon sinners, with a glimpse or opening of mercy running through it; the New Testament is the book of reconciliation, pardon, and peace, and the full manifestation of the riches of divine grace to a lost world; but still in agreement with everlasting, unchangeable justice. And if the mercy of it does not work in us to a right end, to make us fear God, it speaks the same truth, and pronounces the same sentence upon us; for *therein* also "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," Rom. i. 18. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment," are Christ's own words, Matt. xxv. 46. And we are told as plainly, as that Adam should die for his disobedience, that "those who know not God," so as to fear him, "and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. Let us not, therefore, separate what God hath

joined together, but consider the Old and New Testament as two different parts of the same design; one discovering to us the wrath of God for sin, the other his mercy in the pardon of it, and both to the end we may fear him; as we shall, if we know how much it cost to redeem us, and that if we are not made partakers of Christ by faith making us new creatures, "the word which he hath spoken will judge us at the last day," and give us up to the power of God's wrath for ever!—The sum of what I have delivered to you on the words of the text is this:

That there is wrath, and a power of wrath in God, very terrible to think of; which because we are backward to believe, and too commonly strengthen ourselves in wickedness by the denial of it, is confirmed to us by the fall of man, and a great many examples of God's judgments upon sin and sinners, recorded in the Old Testament.

That, according to another interpretation of the text, if we fear God, we need not fear his displeasure. For though we have always sin enough, in our very best estate, to put us in fear, considering the justice of God, and the strictness of his law, yet in Christ dying for us we are discharged from condemnation; and if we see the accursed nature of sin in his sufferings, and learn from thence to fear God, we are in a safe condition, may rejoice in him as a reconciled Father, and glory in the New Testament, as the covenant of our peace.

The Lord of his mercy speak to you where I cannot, and fill your hearts with an awful, continual fear and reverence of his holy name. When God saw how great the wickedness of man was upon the earth, it is farther said, "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart," Gen. vi. 6. Oh! be

not you that man or woman, of whom it may be said, it repenteth the Lord that he made *you*, and that, speaking after the manner of men, it grieveth him for the curse you choose to lie under, and for the misery which he sees coming upon you! Let Christ remove it from your souls and bodies, and be very thankful that you have such a Saviour in his blood, and that for his sake, whenever you come to him in faith, the sins you repent of will never be remembered against you. God forbid that you should be doing nothing all your lives but "treasuring up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Go home, and pray for yourselves that you may have the grace given you to consider the power of it, and so to fear the displeasure of God, as never to have the weight of it fall upon you. And the Lord be with you, in his love, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

SERMON VIII.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?
And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.
And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Matt. xvi. 15—17.

THIS one saying of Peter, with the answer of Jesus, is the key to all Scripture, the grand design, completion, glory, and comfort of it; and therefore it is a matter of the greatest importance to us to be well grounded in it.

Take away this, and it has no instruction, no glad tidings, no salvation for you. Know this, and you will have a full opening into the meaning of the whole Bible. The fall of man, the curse of sin, and the necessity of redemption from it; the justice, mercy, and love of God; his hatred of sin, his judgments upon sinners, our inability to deliver ourselves, and his will to help and save us; all will break in upon us with a flood of light, and be found to have its full explanation in this one point, that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord stir you up by means of this text, to look for your portion in him, as the sum and substance of all Scripture; and to search it diligently, to the end you may find him therein, as your God and Saviour, to the present comfort and everlasting salvation of your souls.

We read in the foregoing words, that our Lord, in order to draw from the disciples a confession of their faith, asked them what the world thought and said of him, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" And when they told him that some said one thing, and some another, but none hit upon the truth, he asked again, "But whom say ye that I am?" To which Peter answered, in the name of them all, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" thou art that great Prophet that should come into the world; anointed, and sent of God, to be the Saviour of mankind; and though thou art like one of us, and appearest as a man, and nothing but the son of man, yet we believe thou art that Son of Man spoken of by the prophet Daniel, (chap. vii. 13.) and "the Son of the living God." Now, then, let Christ's answer sink down into your ears, and when you hear it, lift up your hearts to God in prayer for yourselves—"Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." O my soul! how does this affect

thee? Art thou seeking after, art thou come to this blessedness? For it is all thine, and belongs to thee as well as it did to Peter, and as sure as Christ spoke it, when thou canst take up the same words, and say with the same faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

You see, therefore, that this portion of Scripture hath life or death in it, and that we are Christians or not, and shall be happy or miserable for ever, as we do or do not receive it into our hearts. But before I open it to you I would pray for you and myself; and I cannot do it better than in the words of St. Paul, Eph. i. 17—23; "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him; the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power towards them who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places," &c.

I shall now, with the help of God, endeavour to show,

I. What we are to understand by Peter's confession of faith; "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

II. The blessedness of making it truly, and from the heart; "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona."

III. In what way we are brought to it; "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

I. What we are to understand by the words, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter said,

The Christ; the Lord's Christ; the holy, anointed one of God; sustaining in himself the three characters of King, Priest, and Prophet, to all which offices among the Jews, those who bore them were set apart by the ceremony of anointing; that very person promised to Adam in Paradise, as the Restorer and Deliverer of mankind, now fallen in him; revealed to Abraham, as that son of his loins in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed; to David, as the Lord's anointed; to all the prophets, as a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. So that in saying, Thou art not only Christ, but *the* Christ, he had a reference to the hope and expectation of the Jews, grounded on a great number of revelations and prophecies concerning him: a remarkable instance of which great point of belief we have in Simeon, Luke, ii. of whom it is said, that he waited for the consolation of Israel, and to whom it was revealed that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And when he came by the Spirit into the temple, at the time that the child Jesus was presented there to the Lord, after the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!" And in the same chapter we read also of Anna, a prophetess, that she, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise to the Lord, and spake of him to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. I shall not mention these passages of Scripture to you in vain, if they put you upon considering and inquiring whether you have any such belief and rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ, as to bless and praise God for him, as they did; yea, to be very thankful that your lot in the world is appointed at a time when Christ *is* come, and the whole counsel and will of God for the salvation of mankind fully manifested. I am

observing that the saints, who lived before Christ, all holy men and women, looked for his coming, worshipped God in the same faith of him, and trusted for acceptance through him, as we do now; only with this difference, that by living after his coming we have the advantage of them in point of clearness and assurance, and shall be more inexcusable if we do not make the right use of it. When Peter, therefore, said, *Thou art the Christ*, he spake according to the common belief and opinion, warranted by Scripture. Christ was promised and expected as "the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head," or deliver mankind from the power of the devil; and Peter had the grace given him to confess that he who asked him the question, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" was himself that Christ, so long promised, and so often foretold.

But he said more; and God not only guided his tongue to own that he was the Christ, but to declare, for the belief and assurance of all ages, that he was *the Son of the living God;* God in our flesh, and therefore perfectly qualified for the office of our Redeemer; which he could not have been, if he had not been God as well as man, God and man in one person. The work was great; and if God became man to perform it, we may well conclude that no creature, not the highest angel, not the whole multitude of them, was sufficient for it. And I cannot but think that our comfort, and assurance of salvation by Christ, very much depends on this part of Peter's confession, that he was *the Son of the living God;* and that, according to his name Immanuel, he was God with us, not only in grace and power, or as the messenger of God's peace to us; but God in our nature, to do that for us which he alone could do. Christ was the Son of man, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, that he might redeem man in the same nature which had sinned, and

was lost for ever without help; and he was also *the Son of the living God*, God himself, that he might help us effectually, and that in him we might have strong consolation, and rejoice before God all the days of our life, in the hope of complete deliverance. Let us consider, according to the light of Scripture, what the condition of mankind is; that from thence we may discern the greatness of our salvation, and form a just conception of the dignity of the person by whom it is accomplished.

When you see a breathless corpse, do you consider, do you ask yourselves, how it comes to pass that a creature made in the image of God, and designed for happiness, should, after a short life of toil and trouble, pain and sickness, vanity and vexation of spirit, with few and uncertain enjoyments, be given up to death, and laid in the grave to rot and turn to dust? It is the sentence passed upon Adam, the bitter fruit of his disobedience, the curse under which all his children are born. "For as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," Rom. v. 12; that is, by the just judgment of God were reputed sinners, and made subject to death, the punishment of sin. But what is death? Is it the total and final extinction of our being, or the loss only of all thought, sense, and motion for ever? Is this the whole of the sentence to be executed upon us for sin, and does the justice of God extend no farther? When it is said, "The soul that sinneth shall die," Ezek. xviii. 20; when St. Paul says, "The wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23; is nothing meant but the death of the body, or of the whole man, soul and body, never to return to life again? Well would it be for sinners if this was all, if they would take refuge in this hope, poor as it is. But we are told from the lips of truth, that there is a worm which dieth not, and a fire which never shall be quenched; that there is a second

death in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; that there is a time coming when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God in judgment; and those who have not risen from their lost state here, "shall go away into everlasting punishment," Mark, ix. 44. Rev. xxi. 8, xx. 12. Matt. xxv. 46. For though the punishment of sin is first visible in the death of the body, and we see it with our eyes, as a standing, undeniable proof of the truth of God in his threatenings; yet the punishment of the soul is equally a part of his righteous sentence upon sin, and as certain as the other; and though they are separated for a time by the death of the body, yet, if the decree which is gone out against us is not revoked, they must both be separated for ever from God, and reunited to dwell together in endless torments. This is the state of mankind with respect to the sin of the first man, which, we are told, from infallible authority, brought death into the world: and I beseech you attend diligently, and endeavour to go along with me in what I have further to say of our whole state and condition in sin.

You know that we are under a law to God, bound to his service, subject to his authority, made to receive his commands. We are told that "sin is the transgression of the law," 1 John, iii. 4; and cannot but be sensible that if God is the same, and sin the same now, that they were from the beginning, the desert of sin is death. What, of one sin? Yes, of every single act of wilful disobedience. From that moment our lives, our souls are forfeited, the curse of the law has overtaken us, and must do its office in delivering us up to almighty justice. Adam's sin was but one, and to our apprehension the most pardonable of any, because all his posterity were to be involved in the consequence of it. But, nevertheless, we know, by fatal experience, that the sentence which

was pronounced upon him took place, and must for ever have continued in force against him in every part of it, for any thing he could do to reverse it. And what then shall *we* do with our own numberless transgressions? To whom shall we go with the dreadful load of guilt that is upon our souls? What reason have we to stand amazed at our condition, and be fully convinced of the condemnation which is due to us for our offences against the holy, unchangeable God, in our daily breach of his law? For the Scripture cannot be broken, and the meek Lamb of God spake it positively with his own mouth, "Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled," Matt. v. 18. Fulfilled? Where? How? Not by man; not by the greatest saint that ever lived. And yet every jot and tittle of it must be fulfilled. The obligation of it is sacred and indispensable, as being the law of that God who cannot lie, nor change his purpose; and it was ordained to continue in full force and virtue so long as the world endureth. If we look for acceptance at God's hands solely on account of our obedience, it must be perfect and entire to every command, in every part of our lives; and if his law awards death for disobedience, death it must have. You see then what our condition is by nature, as well as actual transgression; what a desperate evil sin is, what ruin it brings upon us, and that we are both condemned and helpless. The Scripture, which never speaketh in vain, says, we are "dead in trespasses and sins," Eph. ii. 1, under a sentence of death for sin, and so dead in sin, that of ourselves we are not able to lift a hand, nor form a wish for our recovery.

But, blessed be God! we are not without remedy. He who made us will have mercy on us; he hath opened to us a door of hope, and it was a reviving word for us all which Peter said; *Thou art the Christ, the Son of*

the living God. Let us, therefore, from what has been observed of the misery of our condition, and death in sin, now consider what is deliverance and salvation from it, by what means it was wrought for us, in what way it comes to us, and what a sure foundation of trust and hope we have in the greatness and transcendent dignity of the Redeemer. He bore our sins in his own body; he fulfilled the law in our stead, that we might have a perfect righteousness to appear in before God; he conquered death; he carried our nature into heaven. All this was to be done before we could be reconciled to God, rescued from hell, and restored to life and happiness. All this he did, and he alone could do. It is the folly and vain confidence of wretched man, blinded by sin, to presume that it has no such guilt as the Scripture charges upon it, and deserves no such punishment as God has denounced against it. And, from hence it comes to pass, that so little account is made of salvation from it, or of our obligations to the Saviour, and that such low and unworthy notions are entertained of his person, grace, and office. But if ever we give way to the discovery of our condition, and take the word of God for our guide, we shall know the mercy of our deliverance to be inexpressibly great, and nothing less than the work of almighty power in conjunction with almighty love.

For Christ, the Son of God, bore our sins in his own body, and with them our punishment; it being inconceivable that he should take them up for any other end than to take them away, to bear the wrath of God for them, to make full satisfaction to his justice, and remove them for ever out of his sight. And this, we are told in the plainest words, he did; "that we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; that God laid on him the iniquities of us all; that by his stripes we are healed; that by one offering (of

himself) he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified;" that is, clean washed in his blood from all spot of sin, Eph. i. 7. Col. i. 14. Isa. liii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 24. Heb. x. 14. He took flesh, and had a body prepared him, that he might sacrifice it upon the cross, and appear in the presence of God for us with his all-atoning blood. He was appointed of God, and willingly offered himself to have the weight of divine vengeance laid upon him for our sins, and the sword of divine justice sheathed in his soul and body, that we might not feel for ever, in our own persons, the hell which he did, when he sweat great drops of blood, and cried out in the bitterness of his soul, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" All this he endured to redeem us from the guilt and curse of our disobedience, and to discharge us from the debt of eternal punishment by his unknown pains and sufferings. For so great they were as hardly to be supportable by himself; and when we read of them, we have not our eyes opened, if we do not devoutly wish that we may never know them.

This, therefore, was the finishing act of his obedience; and now he made good the truth of that saying, which could only be verified in himself, "that one jot or one tittle should not pass from the law, till all was fulfilled." It must be so, and we know how it was done. When God prescribes a law to us, it is his demand upon us for perfect obedience, and the unalterable decree of his will. Nothing less than the utmost exactness of performance is our righteousness in the sight of God; and if we have not this to plead for ourselves at the bar of his judgment, heaven must for ever be shut against us. Alas! it was, and will be, for any thing we can do to satisfy the rigour of the law, in our very best estate. Do not mistake me here, as if there was no other hope for us: but turn your eyes at once to "Christ, the Son of the living God."

That perfection which we all want is to be found in him, as our substitute and surety, doing the whole will of God, not for himself, but in our stead. "Lo, I come," says he, Psalm xl. 9, for this very end, to do what none else could; to work out, and to offer up a spotless righteousness to God in behalf of the sons of men, always sinful in respect of the purity and full extent of the law, and that in him God might be well pleased with them. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Rev. xi. 33. Stand fast here in fulness of belief, as you value your peace. If you are the servants of God, and followers of Christ in holiness (for I speak now to none else), and would have an answer to put in to all your fears of coming short of the glory of God for the imperfection of your obedience, let your knowledge of Christ revive you; see where your righteousness is, and lay hold on him for your security and comfort. It is a blessed encouragement which we have to this, over and over again, from St. Paul. "The Gospel of Christ," he says, "is the revelation of the righteousness of God," Rom. i. 17. That which most peculiarly makes the Gospel what it is, glad tidings, full relief to mankind sinners, and "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," is, that the righteousness of God,—not what we bring to him, but receive from him, that which he appoints for our justification, that which he will accept, that only which is so, the righteousness of Christ, the Son of God,—is therein revealed, offered, and made over to us, as what we must, of all necessity, be found in. If we have it not, if there is no such thing to be had, our case is not a jot the better for Christ; we are still sinners, liable to the condemnation of the law, and lose the great benefit of our faith, so long as we overlook or reject this sweet hope, that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so

by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," Rom. v. 19.

And as Christ thus offered himself without spot to God, for the redemption of our transgressions, and finished the work of obedience he had to do in our stead; so he conquered death for us, and carried our nature triumphantly into heaven, having satisfied the law in all respects, both by suffering the penalty and fulfilling the righteousness of it. For as "he was delivered for our offences, so he was raised again for our justification," Rom. iv. 24; God thereby declaring his acceptance of what he had done and suffered on our behalf, transferring it to us, and, as it were, putting into our hands the title-deed of our heavenly inheritance. For his members were quickened together with him, in and with him rose from the dead, are set down with him in heavenly places; have their life hid or safely treasured up with him; and when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory. These are the very words of Scripture, Eph. ii. 5, 6. Col. iii. 3, 4. Great is the mystery, great is the glory, great is the comfort of them. For by them we are assured that "as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive," 1 Cor. xv. 22; and that we, who are fallen from God by sin into the lowest depth of baseness and misery, shall not only be received to pardon and favour, and the hope of heaven, but in Christ our Head exalted above angels, to a share of that super-eminent dignity which he, as the Son of man and our representative, is possessed of at God's right hand.

If there is any thing farther needful to be observed concerning the acts of Christ, it is, that, in virtue of his obedience and sufferings, his resurrection and ascension into heaven, he sent down the Holy Ghost to guide the apostles he had chosen into all truth, and inspire them with boldness to preach him in the world; to continue

always with his church; to reveal him to the hearts of his faithful people; to dwell in us as the Author and Giver of all grace, and make us the servants of God in holiness. But of this I shall have occasion to speak more fully under the third head.

See now and consider who he is that performed such mighty deeds for us, and made this happy alteration in our condition. Not John Baptist, not Elias, not Jeremias, nor any of the prophets. They could not help us; they had sins of their own to be forgiven, and wanted the same Christ for themselves that we do. Not an angel from heaven: none of them could redeem us; they could have no blood of sufficient worth to make atonement for sin; they could pay no obedience to God but what was due to him on their own account, and have none to spare for others; they could not overcome death and purchase heaven for us; they could not disarm almighty justice, and make a way for mercy to flow in upon us. And, surely, I need not tell you that YOU could not. No; if you would be wise and happy, never think of any thing you do, as of value to save you. Know your sin, know your danger, know your miserable weakness, know the defect of all your works, know the Saviour; and confess with Peter, humbly acknowledging your vileness, admiring the riches of divine grace, and thankfully adoring the love which hath done so great things for you, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" meaning, thereby, that he is God, and, therefore, the strength of our salvation; our Redeemer in his blood, the Lord our righteousness, the resurrection and the life, and the opener of heaven to us, where he is gone to prepare a place for us, and is now at the right hand of God, with full power to bring us thither, and with a supply of all grace in his hands to prepare us for it. For if ever we come to the glory he has provided and purchased for us,

we must be prepared for it by him in his own way. If ever we would be partakers of the merits of his death, stand before God in his righteousness, attain to his resurrection, and sit down with him in his kingdom, we must be faithful to his teaching, and receive him for our Lord and King to reign over us, as well as our Priest to offer up his blood for the remission of our sins.

What he has done, and he alone could do, to recover us out of our lost state, and raise us from our death in trespasses and sins, has been briefly declared. What he has to do in us, and we must, of all necessity, do for ourselves, will appear under the two next heads. Let us consider,

II. The blessedness of making Peter's confession truly, and from the heart.

If you believed the curse of sin, and knew the state of your soul while the guilt of sin is upon you, with the same certainty that you read it in Scripture, what would you wish for? If you were following after righteousness, in order to find favour with God, and often terrified with the strictness of the law and the sight of your imperfection, what would give ease to your troubled thoughts? If you were tormented with the fear of death, lest it give you up to judgment, and saw heaven shut against you, what would you desire, and think deliverance in the case, but to have it opened to you, and the dread of condemnation removed from your heart and conscience? The necessity, you see, is urgent; help is greatly wanted, and must come from some powerful hand, to stand against all your doubts and misgivings. Then look for it where it is to be had. Look unto Jesus, supplying every need, and doing all for you that your souls can desire; living, dying, rising again, and ascending into heaven, and you with him, partakers of all he did, and all he is, when

you can say to him with a true faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Forgiveness, righteousness, peace, victory over sin, death, and hell, grace upon grace, and complete salvation, purchased with his own sweat and blood, without the counsel, will, or help of man; all is yours when you trust in him, and come unto God by him. Is not this blessedness a glorious hope for sinners, far beyond what we could expect or conceive? Yes; it is joy at the believer's heart, his portion from the Lord, and song of praise. He knows that Christ is the Lord's anointed for the salvation of his people; that this is the very thing he came from heaven to accomplish, wrought out for us with his labours and sufferings upon earth, sealed to us with his blood, offers to our acceptance, and will certainly put us in possession of, when we own and believe in him for it. I beseech you, know what you believe in him for. Do not expect less from him than he wants to give you; do not diminish one tittle from it, that you may possess your souls in peace, and rejoice in God your Saviour. And that you may stand fast upon this strong foundation of rest and assurance, I say likewise, do not pretend to add to it in the point of justification. Be careful to keep what Christ has done for you separate in your minds from any thing that he enables you to do for yourselves. What is the reason that we have no more enjoyment of Christ, so little sense of our obligations to him, so little love for him, and do so much less than we might, but because we do not keep our eyes and hearts steadily fixed upon him, as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John, i. 29; and whatever we say, trust as much or more in ourselves than we do in him? The glory of our salvation is all his own, and he will not suffer it to be stained by any help of ours. He loves to see us walking in the faith of it, and devoted to him in obedience; but our great comfort and

ground of rejoicing is in himself, as "of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30; and so long as we preserve this hope pure and unmixed, that he is our Jesus, our life, our all, *we have an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast*, and are so purged in his blood as to *have no more conscience of sins*, or trouble of mind on account of them, lest they should rise up against us at the day of judgment. So we are the blessed of the Lord, heirs of his grace, children of his kingdom, and happy in his favour; and whilst we glory only in Christ, laying all we do at his feet, and humbling ourselves in the dust before him, he says, to every believing soul, what he did to Peter, "Blessed art thou."

But, perhaps, your sins are great, and have been long continued in, and you are ready to harden yourself in wickedness with thinking there is no hope. What! not in "Christ, the Son of the living God?" Is there no hope for you in his bowels, in the sanctity of his life, in the merit of his death, in the might of his Godhead? What one blessing can you think of, which he has not in his heart for you, and power to bestow upon you? Why, his business in the world was to save sinners, and he has none but sinners to save. Hear what he saith himself, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," Matt. ix. 13; and by repentance to faith, and by faith to an interest in him. He prayed for his murderers; and perhaps there was not one of the three thousand converted by St. Peter's first sermon, who had not joined in the cry against him, and consented to his death. What was it that touched their hearts but the preaching of Christ crucified? And what should hinder any of you from attaining to the same mercy which they did? If your unbelief does not, your sins need not; for his name to all generations is Jesus, the Saviour. He did much, that he might forgive much; and his right and power to

absolve the penitent is not less now he is in heaven, than when he was on earth. Peter's confession will be as pleasing to him from your mouths as it was from his; and he only waits to hear it, to pronounce you as blessed as he can make you. To prevent mistake, and guard the doctrine which has been delivered from abuse,

III. Let us now consider in what way we are brought to it.

The confession to be made in order to this blessedness, the great point on which it turns, is, that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God;" that is, appointed of God to the office of saving us, and, as God, able to save us. When Peter confessed this, Christ told him, "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." And I suppose, from hence, that the same faith is by the same revelation to all; not only, or chiefly, by the use of our own reason or understanding in what we read or hear, but by an inward, spiritual work. For though Peter might have known in some measure that he was the Christ, from his miraculous birth and actions, divine knowledge, authoritative teaching, and holy life, yet he is referred to a higher cause for power to make the confession he did. Outwardly, and with the lips, we may do so too; but, making it truly from the heart, to a change of our state, to newness of life, to the saving of the soul, is by help from God. Observe carefully in what method, and by what steps we come to this confession, and then you may be convinced that help is wanted, and some greater power than our own necessary to bring us to it.

"Christ, the Son of the living God," came down from heaven to save a world of sinners, to deliver us from the death and curse we were under for sin, by laying down his life for us. Then there is a depth of evil in sin, and

misery annexed to it, far exceeding what we could ever have thought of, since the Son of God must become man to save us from justice, and suffer the punishment we had deserved. This is one necessary step towards Christ. For, without the knowledge of sin, how deadly it is in its nature, and how hateful to God, we can neither understand the necessity of salvation from it, nor the greatness of the Saviour.

But you may be convinced of this, in some sort, without ever coming nearer to Christ, our looking out for a remedy. Your own sin, and the desert of it, has that been seen and lamented; insomuch, that you know, with infallible certainty and deep conviction, that whoever else is or is not, you yourself are a sinner, guilty of eternal death for your manifold breaches of the law of God, and that Christ must have died to save you from damnation if there had never been another man in the world?

Well, we will suppose you have taken this step too, and are now sensible both of the evil of sin, and of the greatness of your own in particular, and that something must be done to save you from the destruction of it. But where will you go with your sin, and what will you do in this extremity? Will you strive hard to get out of your danger, as well as you can, by your own endeavours? Or will you take another step forward, go to Christ with your soul, tell him of the danger of your case, and cast yourself wholly upon him for help and deliverance? If you do not, you know your sin to very little purpose, and as little of Christ, as little of yourself, your undone state, and miserable insufficiency, when you would be taking his work of omnipotence into your own hands.

Once more, do not go to Christ for less than you want, and he has to give; I mean, a perfect righteousness.

Your own, in the very best state you will ever be in on this side of the grave, when you have done all you can, will be obedience only in part, far short of what he requires of you, and therefore, upon the whole, no better than sin. You must not think of pleading this before God for your justification. You are told that you must "rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh," Phil. iii. 3, or any thing you do, as entitling you to the reward of eternal life. If you would be safe, and at rest from all your fears of coming short of the glory of God, you must behold it in the person of Christ, and be grounded in this belief of him, that God "made him who knew no sin, to be sin for us," not only in our sinful nature, but laid the sin of the world upon his head, and gave him to obey and die for our sins, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. v. 21.

All these points, the evil and damnableness of sin, every man's sinfulness, and the necessity of Christ's atonement and righteousness for all, the Scripture reveals to us with sufficient clearness, and in words easy to be understood. But then it also tells us as plainly, that, without a supernatural assistance, they will not be understood, or believed, to any saving purpose. "For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," no man does by the strength of his own reason only, "for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Cor. ii. 14. To which purpose it is remarkable, that Christ told the disciples, notwithstanding what he had taught them, and testified of himself during his abode upon earth, that "it was expedient for them that he should go away," namely, to send down the Holy Ghost, "to teach them all things," as it were, over again, "to bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had

said unto them," and "to guide them into all truth," John, xiv. 26; xvi. 7, 13. And if they wanted the Spirit to bring to their remembrance, and teach them effectually, what they had heard before from Cnrist's own mouth, it is not to be supposed that any now are better qualified or better disposed to receive what they hear, have less occasion for a divine influence to make it light and life in their hearts, or less need to pray for the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

Consider only how the case stands with us in regard of the several particulars I have already mentioned.

The great evil of sin, and God's will to punish it, is a fundamental doctrine of Scripture; but how little is it attended to, nay, how vehemently do we struggle against it! Put the reason of man to answer the questions, what sin is, or how God shall deal with sinners, and he will make sin in the main a harmless thing, shrink up the notion of God into the single idea of mercy, deride and bid defiance to his justice. That it is so, the general fearlessness of God and of sin testifies against us to our faces; and, I beseech you, let your own hearts bear witness to the truth of what I am saying.

Again, it is hard for every one of us to see our own sin; to be convinced of and acknowledge the depth of our fall from God; the pride, sensuality, and worldliness of our natures; the self-will, disobedience, and unbelief, which God in Scripture lays to our charge; our forgetfulness, contempt, and even hatred of God; in a word, our desert of damnation. You are denying the charge now while I am speaking, flying to vain excuses, and saying within yourselves, every man and woman to clear one, This is hard judging, and unreasonable aggravation of the state of mankind.

And when you do see and acknowledge your sin, you will be for dealing with it in your own strength. You will

think of nothing but making your peace with God as well as you can by your own doings, your repentance, your future obedience, something or other that you can call your own. The natural pride of your hearts will keep you to a law-work; and so long as you can find any thing within yourselves to support you against self-condemnation, the sole remedy of God's providing for sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ, your only hope, will be rejected; you will not consent to come to him naked and stript of all, as condemned malefactors, for pardon and righteousness.

And do you not now perceive why he said to Peter, "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee?" and what reason St. Paul had to affirm, that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost?" 1 Cor. xii. 3. To confess, from the bottom of our souls, that we are undone sinners, by nature as well as actual transgression; that we are snatched as brands out of the fire, and can be saved only by grace; to receive and apply Christ for salvation, in a full renunciation of ourselves as insufficient for the work: this is the foundation we must be upon for life. And yet, though Christ is so seasonable a mercy to us, such full relief, and so exactly suited to our wants, we do not, we cannot receive him without grace given us from above, and the supernatural working of the Spirit of God, enlightening our understandings, leading and drawing us to him. The feeling of our wants, the unfeigned acknowledgment of them, the desire of help from God, the humility of casting ourselves wholly upon Christ for deliverance, never was the work of any man's own spirit; and all the calls of God to repent and believe the Gospel would be only speaking to the dead, all his promises would be ineffectual, if we were not stirred up by himself to hear and embrace them.

You need not suppose that this is to be done only in

a way of *extraordinary* grace, and by God's putting a force, as it were, upon our wills; though he is pleased so to work in some, for the conviction of others, as well as in great mercy to themselves; and I can hardly think that any are called out of a state of darkness into the marvellous light of Christ, without some knowledge of the hand of God in it. But, nevertheless, the work, especially as to the progress of it, is more generally carried on in secret; and our wills and affections are brought over to God in the use of our own reason and understanding, in such a manner as not easily to be distinguished from what he does in us, and to the end we may serve him with full choice and freedom of spirit. And those who, by the benefit of a religious education and the grace of God, have always kept close to him in the faith of Christ, and the sincerity of a pure obedience, would be great enemies to themselves if they questioned the goodness of their state, on account of the Spirit's operation being concealed from them, as to the time and manner of it. Where he does work savingly, it may as certainly be known, as that corn and other fruits of the earth, when they are come to maturity, have had the benefit of rain and sunshine. It is our Lord's own comparison, Mark, iv. 27; "so is the kingdom of God"—in the world, and in every soul—"as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how;" that is, as it keeps going forward and attains its full growth imperceptibly, so is a work of grace in the soul. And again, he likens it to the wind, John, iii. 8; we hear the sound of it, and see an effect, but can give no account how it rises, and where it ends. On the contrary, we may know certainly where there is no effect wrought, nor work of the Spirit, by understanding what it is. It is faith in Christ dying for our sins,

making our peace with God, delivering us from eternal death, and opening a way for us into the kingdom of heaven; and the only thing which drives us to him as our refuge, and the Christ of God, is a penitent humbling sense of our guilt, danger, and misery in sin. The Spirit first shows us of the things of Christ, by revealing them in the Scripture; and then, in the use of Scripture or the preaching of the word, reveals them to our hearts. This is his office in the world; and he has no way of bringing souls to Christ, but by first convincing them of sin, and then showing them their want of him for salvation. So that, if you are strangers to any such work as this, if you are ignorant of, or deny, your sin, if you have not been earnestly seeking after Christ to deliver you from it, and do not prize your portion in him as your greatest treasure, and resolve to keep it in spite of all the world, you are in the darkness of unbelief; your profession of Christ is not from any knowledge wrought into your hearts; you are Christians only in name; and "the grace of God, which bringeth salvation," hath not yet appeared to you.

And now you see the reason why there is so little appearance of Christian practice among us, and why you are such strangers to a life of godliness; why you do not keep your sabbaths conscientiously as unto the Lord; why you do not value and read the Scripture more; why you are not oftener upon your knees to God in secret; why you have no prayer or appearance of religion in your families; why you do not come constantly to the sacrament; why the breaking of a commandment is as nothing in your eyes, and you never sit down to examine, as in the presence of God, how your obedience stands with regard to any one of them. It is because what you call your religion has nothing of the Spirit in it, but is something which you take up without his rule, and can

easily conform to without his help. It is because you have not been made to see the curse of sin, and the extreme danger of your condition, in Christ hanging on the cross; it is because you do not know and consider that he died in vain as to you, if you do not come to him with a faith of the Spirit's working, for healing in his blood. You do not show your love to him by keeping his commandments, by owning him in the world, by living as his disciples, because you have so little sense of his benefits, and of the greatness of his love to you. Nay, you think lightly, and many speak reproachfully, of the peculiar Scripture doctrine of salvation by faith, from a secret suspicion that it will carry you farther into the depth of your hearts, oblige you to a greater strictness of living, put you upon doing more than at present you find yourselves inclined to, and lay a heavier cross upon you than you are willing to bear. But if you would have hope towards God, or comfort of your religion, see to it that you receive Christ as a Saviour indeed; so lost in yourselves as to perish for ever without him; so helpless in yourselves as to need the aid of an Almighty Spirit to bring you to him in repentance and faith, and keep you faithful to him in obedience and submission to his commands.

For I must now tell you that this is a very precious part of his salvation, necessarily included in Peter's confession of him; and that if you do not give yourselves up to his teaching and authority, to be renewed by him to the image of God in holiness, you cannot say by the Spirit that he is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." One great end of his coming into the world to die for us, was to show us the abominable nature of sin, and the death to which it subjects us in the just judgment of God; certainly, not to make it a less evil in itself, for that, we may venture to say, is one of the things which

God cannot do; nor to make it appear less in our eyes, or less dangerous than it was before; but that we might for ever abhor and cast it from us, seeing it could be purged, and the foul stains of it washed out, with nothing but his blood. The Scripture will not suffer us to be deceived in this great point. The whole and every part of it, from beginning to end, is a design for holiness; and it knows of no "grace of God which bringeth salvation," but that "which teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," Titus, ii. 11, 12. You can bear me witness that I so preach Christ, namely, as the Lord and Governor of a willing people, and "the Author of eternal salvation to them that obey him," Heb. v. 9. I would be very thankful to God for Christ, and know I must receive his salvation as a gift, and not the purchase of my own works; and am continually advising you to rest your souls upon this belief, that, being "justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. v. 1; but I could have no hope of being accepted to this blessed peace, if I did not preach him to you and myself as our lawgiver and example. His own words are too plain to be denied or disputed, and I pray God write them all in our hearts: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven," Matt. vii. 21. But besides his authority and positive declarations in the case, many times repeated, the faith by which we believe in him is founded on a supposition of the danger of sin, and the necessity of obedience. Its nature, I mean, in the Spirit's hands, and as wrought in us by him, is to purify the heart, and bring us to a better kind and higher degrees of holiness, than we could possibly attain without it. I shall endea-

vour to make you sensible of this in few words, and so conclude.

Faith is looking to Jesus, as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" believing that he died for it, and that, therefore, we could be freed from the condemnation of it only by the sacrifice of his death. And there is no way of coming to this faith but by repentance, which is the knowledge of sin, sorrow for sin, and a will to forsake sin. And again, why do we believe that Christ died for this end? How is it possible we should believe on him as appointed by God to deliver us from the guilt and punishment of our sin, if we do not feel it as a load upon our consciences, and dread it as the plague of our natures, and the bane of our happiness? But if we thus feel and fear it, and heartily repent of it, and know how much it cost to redeem us from it, as we must in order to faith, what shall persuade us to return to it, and resume the curse of it? How is fearlessness of sin, or a purpose of continuing in it, consistent with repentance for it? And if we do not repent of it, what hope can we have of being saved by Christ, or benefit of that faith in him, which supposes that we do truly repent of all sin, requires it of us, and is certainly false if it does not turn our wills against it? You see, therefore, that faith, in the very notion of it, wherever it is true, and a faith of the Spirit's operation, worketh to the destruction of sin, and purifieth the heart.

But it does still more, and has a virtue and power in it to place us upon a right foundation of obedience, and to engage and confirm us in the pursuit of holiness, from a root of love. "We love him," saith St. John, "because he first loved us," 1 Epist. iv. 19; meaning, that otherwise we do not and cannot, but that, in the knowledge and faith of God's love to us, we have a powerful

call to admire the riches of his goodness, and the strongest of all motives to love him again. Our souls lost and redeemed—God sending his own Son into the world to seek and to save us—Christ washing us from our sins in his blood, conquering death and hell, rising triumphantly from the grave, and ascending into heaven for us, that we, wretched sinners, might be partakers of his merits and heirs of his glory as the children of his bowels—"herein," saith the same apostle, "is love;" unspeakable, almighty love! And again he says, "Behold it!" for it is the Spirit's great argument to the soul to give up all its corruption, all its opposition to such undeserved kindness; his fire in the heart of a believer, to purge it from its dross, to melt down all its stubbornness, and inflame it with love and gratitude to God. And holiness on this ground is acceptable to him, the restoration and right frame of our minds, Christ's freedom, whereby, in the spirit of adoption, we cry, Abba, Father, and serve him, not with a slavish fear, but with the disposition of dutiful and affectionate children. If you can find any thing besides faith, which thus purifieth the heart and worketh by love, then reject it. And, I beseech you, do not pretend to it if you do not purpose and endeavour to keep the commandments. For, look which way you will, it points to obedience. If sin brings you up to the cross of Christ for pardon, see what a curse there is in it. If you think of the love which he had in his heart for you, when he willingly died upon it to save you from eternal misery, how can you love, how can you retain that abominable thing which shed his blood, which his soul hateth, and which, in pity to yourself, he so earnestly advises you to renounce?

Would you then say as Peter did, truly, and from the heart, with the same faith, by the same Spirit, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?" Let this be

the meaning of your confession, that he is your life and all your hope. Let it be your constant prayer, that you may acknowledge him as living, dying, and rising again, to reconcile you to God, and redeem you from death, when you could not possibly do it by any work, power, or merit of your own. And let it be your steadfast belief, that if you do not receive him in his commands as your Lord and Governor, you deny him in a necessary part of his grace and office, resist his Spirit, and can have no share in his salvation.

I shall only mention one inference from the whole, and that is, what cause we have to be thankful to God for the promise of the Spirit, to pray for his coming in our souls, and to put them under his guidance. Whilst I was speaking to you of our natural blindness in the things of God, and inability to receive Christ, you might, perhaps, make a handle of it for continuing as you are, and think with yourselves that, if you had not grace given you to believe, you could not help it. But this would be a sad mistake and abuse of the doctrine of the Spirit. You do not think and act thus with respect to your bodies or worldly concerns; when you know you want help, you do not sit still and do nothing, but go to those who you know can advise and assist you. Do as much for your souls. Go to God, and beg of him to send his Spirit to open your eyes and teach your hearts. Read the Scripture to put yourself in his way; pray for him, and he will come and abide with you, as sure as Christ said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." You should reason thus with yourselves: that if God promises the Spirit, it is because we want him; that what he promises, he will certainly give; and that if we have him not, we must die unbelievers, and be undone for ever. And he has two ways of manifesting himself to us, and helping us: one is by the words of Scripture, the other is by

setting it home upon our minds. As he presents the truth to us, so he inclines us to receive it; and as he alone can reveal it, so he alone can work in us both to will and do according to it. Let not, therefore, the disputers of this world pride themselves in their natural knowledge, and set it up against the light of Scripture, for it is all blindness and folly; and if they would but once ask themselves whose mind it is they pretend to know, it would be enough to shame them into a confession of their ignorance. Neither let those who receive the Scripture think they have nothing to do but to work with it as well as they can in the use of their own understandings; for Christ, the sum and substance of it, will be therein preached and offered to them in vain, without divine illumination and inward teaching, to humble them, to convince them of their sin and weakness, and guide them to him, as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Let none plead against their own souls, that they cannot know, believe, and do what is required of them, when they have an almighty Spirit to enable them, nor charge God foolishly till they have tried what one prayer will do for them. Let the poor and unlearned, especially, be thankful that they have such a teacher and assistant in the Spirit of God, and know for their comfort that he can work as effectually in them, as easily bring them to Christ, and make them as wise for heaven, as any others. And let us all take the word of God for our rule, that we may know what we have to do, and how we must be saved; and then we shall pray to the Lord with our hearts, as we do with our lips, that, by his holy inspiration, we may think those things that be good, and, by his merciful guiding, may perform the same, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON IX.

For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers, once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins. Hebrews, x. 2.

THE apostle is here drawing a comparison between the sacrifices of the law and that of Christ, in order to show the superior excellence and absolute necessity of the latter. Which he does upon this ground; that the offering of the body of Christ, once for all, was sufficient to answer the great end which no other sacrifices could, viz. to obtain the remission of sin in all ages of the world; "he by one offering having perfected for ever them that are sanctified," ver. 14. Whereas the sacrifices under the law, being only representations, or memorials, of the one great sacrifice which was to be offered, were continually repeated; which they needed not to have been, if they had possessed any virtue or efficacy of themselves to take away sins. "For then," says the apostle, "would they not have ceased to be offered?" And the answer is, Yes, they certainly would; and that for the reason here given, because "the worshippers once purged would have had no more conscience of sins," i. e. no sense of guilt remaining upon the conscience; but instead thereof, peace with God, a happy assurance of his favour, and deliverance from all their fears on account of transgression. My business is with the latter clause of the text; and in treating upon these words, I shall endeavour to set forth the comfortable doctrine implied in them.

I. The purification of the conscience from guilt and fear, through the efficacy of the sacrifice which Christ offered for sin upon the cross : and

II. The influence of this grand Gospel remedy upon the temper and conduct of all true believers.

I. We are to consider *the purification of the conscience*, &c. A guilty conscience is the source of all our misery; it poisons every comfort of life, fills us with tormenting fear, and keeps us at a distance from that God who is alone able to make us happy. Hence the first wish of an awakened sinner is to get rid of this load which oppresses him, and to recover the favour of God, which is better than life itself. Happy for him that the very relief he wants for his wounded conscience, is the great thing provided for him in the Gospel. He is there told that Christ hath suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, and, by the sacrifice of himself, made reconciliation for iniquity. He is assured that, upon his repentance and belief of the truth, all his sins, how many soever, are forgiven. This is the *purging* of the conscience, the *perfecting* and *sanctifying* so often mentioned in this epistle. This is what the same St. Paul calls "holding faith and a good conscience," 1 Tim. i. 19. And again, "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," iii. 9. We do this when, in the power of a true faith, we rejoice before God, that he laid on Christ the iniquity of us all; and so transferred the guilt and punishment thereof to him, that we are entirely and for ever released from that debt, may plead his sufferings on our behalf as full payment to justice, and our absolute discharge from condemnation. Thus the conscience becomes *good* and *pure* before God. Thus we are "made perfect, as pertaining to the conscience," Heb. ix. 9. Thus our conscience is "purged from dead (deadly, damning) works," ver. 14; and the "heart is

sprinkled from an evil conscience," x. 22. And thus hath Christ "perfected for ever them that are sanctified," so that they have no more conscience of sins, no more dread of wrath, or of God's vengeance against them, than if an angel was to bring them a pardon under the broad seal of Heaven. The sin of their nature, and the sins of their lives, are clean wiped out of God's book; every curse is removed from their souls and bodies; the sting of death is taken away; every believer stands before God as a child of his family and kingdom, washed from all spot of sin in the blood of the holy Jesus, whom he puts on in his perfect righteousness, meritorious death, and joyful resurrection. What, my friends? Is it so indeed, that "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus?" Rom. viii. 1. One sin lost Adam his paradise, brought a curse upon the earth, and death upon himself and all his posterity: is not only that sin forgiven to you and to me, if we are his people, but the countless sum of all our own personal transgressions, without exception? Does the Bible hold forth to us such unlooked for reconciliation, and is there such a remedy for undone, perishing creatures in all the riches of God's nature? Yes, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The incarnate God, the bleeding Saviour, the Lamb of God's providing, can answer all these questions, hard as they may seem; and when he cried out upon the cross — *It is finished!* — the believing soul knows that all the guilt of his sin expired with that breath, and that the redemption of mankind from sin, death, and hell, was completed then and there upon Mount Calvary. The sword of God's justice was sheathed in the blood of his Son, never again to be drawn for vengeance against any who run into the arms of the Saviour; and when the conscience is pained with a sense of guilt, it is authorized to appeal to that act, and

plead the blood of Christ for its cleansing. He bore the stroke in and for his people, and they in and with him, by divine appointment, and as members of his body; so that we that are his flock, suffered together with our Shepherd, paid the vast debt we owed, and by virtue of our union with him, and in God's account, are as clear and innocent as he is.

But, nevertheless, though it is so joyful an article of our faith, so peculiarly the grace of the new covenant, and the chief benefit we have by Christ, so necessary to our being Christians, and gives that ease and quiet to our minds which nothing else can; though it is a truth, of all others the most important, so often repeated and inculcated for our assurance, and stands so full to view in the words of the text, that the conscience, trusting in the sacrifice of Christ, is purged from its guilt, clear of sin in God's account, and may be as spotless in its own, as if sin had never been committed, yet it is difficult to bring this blessed truth and conscience together. Perhaps there is not any one point of our religion more unknown; or, if known, less enjoyed. For the foundation and chief corner-stone is still too generally rejected, as to its most important office of sustaining the weight of our salvation. The precious blood of atonement is slighted by some, greatly undervalued by others, and even those who know its worth, do not trust in it enough, but suffer their fears to prevail against their belief, to damp their comfort, and hinder their progress.

How great is the number of those in all places, whose lives bear witness against them that they slight the blood of Christ, and though he calls them to wash and be clean, yet choose rather to wallow in the filth of sin, and continue loathsome spectacles in his sight, than to accept of mercy at his hands! Their sins cry

for vengeance; the misery of their condition is greater than can be expressed; he came with bowels of melting pity to rescue and to save them; he gave his life a ransom for theirs; his hands and feet, heart and head, were all pierced, and his sacred blood poured out, even to the last drop, for their redemption; and yet they despise it, and the language of their hearts is, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? My brethren, do not so wickedly; do not thus trample under foot the blood that was shed for you, do not perish for ever by rejecting such mercy. Come to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. For, sinners as you are, there is a fountain opened in his side, and he calls aloud to you from his cross to "behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." And would to God you might begin from this day, with shame and sorrow, to behold him pierced *by* you, and sacrificed *for* you! I know it is vain to expect attention from any but the humble and penitent sinners. To such I would speak comfortably; and, O Lord, do thou speak powerfully to their hearts! Now that your eyes are opened to see your sin, you will, perhaps, think it is too great to be forgiven; and the sight of your defilement will be apt to strengthen your unbelief, and drive you from Christ, instead of bringing you to him. But remember that he died for sinners, for enemies, and rebels; and the conclusion is good against all your fears, and in spite of the enemy of your souls, that he, therefore, died for such as *you*. Know your desert, plead your unworthiness, humble yourselves before him, come to him in faith, and you may safely leave the rest to him; he knows how to bear the weight of your sins, and make your peace with God. Remember that saying of St. Paul, "it is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" Why then should any be so much their own enemies as to

condemn themselves? Remember that this may be said by the greatest of sinners, if they will receive Christ, if they are convinced of sin, and willing to lay it down at his feet; and so long as there is a God in heaven, or a Bible in the world, they need not give themselves up for lost. Lost! No; not till the blood of Christ has lost all its virtue. They may have their consciences purged, and their souls revived, and be happy for ever in the belief of God's mercy in Christ. The door stands wide open for them; and nothing can shut it against them but the impenitence and hardness of their own hearts.

Some greatly undervalue the blood of Christ. They have a fair appearance, both with respect to the worship of God, and their conversation in the world; and they make a merit of it, supposing that God will account it to them for righteousness, and bestow heaven upon them for it. My brethren, your own obedience, if it was a thousand times better than ever it will be, is not, cannot be the purging of your consciences; and that for this plain reason, because at the best it is very imperfect, and far short of the strict demands of the law. And how then can you trust in it, and expect to be justified by it, when, in truth, and in the sight of God, it is no better than sin? Let me advise you to beware of this mistake, as you love your souls, as you value your peace, as you would have any joy of Christ, and of the grace which is by him. The question you all have to answer is this—"What must I do to be saved?" If you say, Repent and grow better, as God shall enable us, so you must; but let me tell you, this answer is not according to knowledge. St. Paul's answer to this question was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts, xvi. 31. And again, he says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God," Heb. xi. 6, i. e. without faith in Christ, as "of God made unto us wisdom,

righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30; in a word, our whole salvation. For he is all, and we are nothing. His unsearchable riches will answer all our wants; his blood will be above the cry of conscience; his peace will quiet the heart; his righteousness will be a glorious covering for our souls. But if, instead of being thus rich and happy in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will wrap yourselves in a righteousness of your own, consider how you will ever be able to make it good. The righteousness which the law approves, and God will accept for its own sake, must be perfect and entire, without flaw or spot of sin, from the beginning to the end of your lives. Have any of you such a one to plead before God? No, you do not say this. But you would gladly hope that you have some degree of goodness, which God will pronounce to be such; so setting one foot at least upon your own righteousness. What then is that goodness, or something like it, which you make the ground of your boasting, and would have it look as great in the eyes of God as it does in your own? Is it that of loving God with all the heart, reverencing his name, word, sabbaths, and sacraments, owning him in all your ways, praying to him in secret, and setting up his worship in your families? Is it that of loving your neighbour as yourselves, wishing all the good to his soul that you should to your own, doing to him in all cases, fairly and equitably, as you would have him to do to you, and neither speaking nor thinking ill of him? Is it striving, watching, and praying against all sin, resolving to do the will of God sincerely and with a perfect heart, as unto the Lord, never turning aside to the right hand or to the left, nor making any reserve in your obedience? I may come much lower; is there one grace of your soul, one action, one hour of your life, which you think will bear

to be tried in God's balance? Verily, we are all concluded under sin; and you now see why we must not put our own doings in the place of Christ, nor join them together with him in the office of justifying us. It is because they cannot justify themselves.

Here, then, the necessity of some other method of justification forces itself upon us. And if there is one of God's revealing and appointing, let us turn the eye of the soul that way. If all we can do is utterly ineffectual to this end, let us give up all pretensions to it, and thankfully ascribe to Christ the whole glory of making us clean; for he will do it, and he only can. His blood *is* cleansing; his righteousness *is* sufficient to answer all the demands of law and justice; and blessed be God that it may be ours by faith. Blessed be God that we have this hope to fly to, and though undone in ourselves, may be "accepted in the Beloved." Abraham was called the friend of God; and yet he looked to Christ for salvation, saw his day, and was glad. And of him it is that St. Paul says, "to him that worketh not"—in perfection, or with a view to be accepted on that account before God—"but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly"—as every man upon earth is in the sight of God—"his faith is counted to him for righteousness," Rom. iv. 5. David was the man after God's own heart, in respect of his zeal for the true religion and worship; and yet he, knowing his own sin, says, "Blessed is the man,"—mark it well; not who has no sin, but—"to whom the Lord will not impute sin," Psalm xxxii. 2. Job had this testimony, that he "was a perfect man and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil;" i. e. far beyond what the generality of men do. And yet he is represented to us as taking a false measure of his integrity, and standing upon it with unwarrantable confidence before God. And when his eyes were opened, he

was struck dumb with the sight of his vileness, and humbled himself before his Maker with this confession, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," Job, xlii. 6. Cornelius was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway," Acts, x. 2. And what then? Was this his righteousness in the sight of God? No; he was directed by a vision to send for Peter, "who should tell him words whereby he and all his house should be saved," that is, to preach Christ to him for salvation, xi. 14. Paul, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, was blameless." He had a great zeal for it, and walked so strictly according to it, as to be able to justify himself before men; but after he was struck to the earth with a light from heaven, he was taught to "account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus," Phil. iii. 6—8. Ah! let these examples, which were written for our instruction, and speak so full to the purpose, strike up a light within you, and settle you once for all in the knowledge of Christ, perfecting and sanctifying, justifying and saving you. Do what you will, you will find sure footing no where else. If he does not purge your consciences from dead works, you will either be blinded with self-conceit, and stand before God in the confidence of that greatest of all falsehoods, your own righteousness; or be continually haunted with tormenting fears of his displeasure, on every breaking out of natural corruption, and have those sayings ringing in your ears all your lives, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. "The wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23. Hear, in a word, what our church says of this matter in the 11th Article: "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for

our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort." I pray God fill you with this comfort, and show you the deceitfulness of every other. Indeed, indeed, my brethren, peace with God by Jesus Christ, and eternal justification by the blood of his cross, is glad tidings for sinful man, and sweet preaching to the distressed conscience, if you were but once laid low enough in your own eyes to receive it, and say, with the humble publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Luke, xviii. 13.

I have now told you, on the warrant of the text, how the conscience is purged, what it is that gives relief to our minds, when the sense of guilt and of God's wrath for sin lies hard upon us, or what foundation we must be upon for life. Not our own works; they can be no saviours to us. If they were much better than ever they will be, and we were never to commit another sin as long as we lived, they could not blot out the hand-writing that is against us; the best thing we can do, is to give them all up to mercy. I beseech you observe, the apostle says, the sacrifices of the law ceased, because they could not purge the conscience, or set us clear with God. It was necessary that they should give place to something that would, viz. the sacrifice of Christ. It is therefore evident, that his sacrifice, and his only, was sufficient for this end, and that by trusting in it, we have remission of sins, and reconciliation with God, peace of conscience, and a hope of glory. If any thing else could have wrought this great effect, or made such a happy change in our condition, we may venture to say the blood of Christ would never have been shed. The opening of the matter is briefly this; as the sin of the first man brought us under a sentence of death and eternal separation from God, so we also learn, from the punishment inflicted on it, who the God is with

whom we have to do; and that every other sin, every single sin we commit, subjects us to condemnation. If, therefore, God was to have proceeded with us only and altogether in a way of justice, we must have been undone for ever, and no man upon earth could be saved. And yet his justice is as much a part of himself as any of his other perfections, and must be satisfied: but how could this be without exacting the penalty of sin? It did this; but, behold! at the same time, in a most adorable way of mercy, and so condemning the sin as to spare the sinner! When no other sacrifice of atonement for the sin of the world could be found in earth or heaven, God gave his eternal and only begotten Son to redeem us from the curse and penalty of our sins; and, what was equally necessary, to work out a perfect righteousness, by his unsinning obedience to the law in our stead, and on our account. And he, by covenant with the Father, and for the joy of redeeming a multitude of lost souls, willingly took the curse upon himself, and came into the world to suffer what we should have suffered, and do what we could not. Hear the words, and let your hearts leap for joy, for they are very comfortable: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God," Psalm xl. There is great force in that word *I*. Not a man like ourselves; not the highest angel. One of them was sent to the blessed Virgin with the glad tidings of her conception; that was honour enough for him, and all he could do. Not the whole multitude of the heavenly host: they could join in the song of praise for the glory of his humble birth; but none of them could say, with respect to the great work of man's deliverance, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." None of them could accomplish it. No, O Jesus! mighty to save, it is thy work and thy praise. And if mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, had not met together in thy person, in perfect harmony with each other; if the blood

which was shed for us had not been the blood of God as well as man, we must have been unhelped, unpurged, unsanctified, sad monuments of God's justice, outcasts from his mercy, and for ever unclean in his sight. Blessed be thy grace, blessed be thy love, blessed be thy bowels of compassion, thou didst come; thou didst empty thyself to take upon thee the form of a servant, and become obedient to death, even the death of the cross; thou, who couldst, hast done the will of God, and "*by* this will we are sanctified," i. e. pure in God's sight by his sacrifice, merits, and righteousness. So he hath bruised the serpent's head for the first man, and his fallen sinful posterity; so he hath blotted out our transgressions, original and actual, as a thick cloud is scattered by the heat of the sun, and vanishes quite out of sight. So, "by his own blood, he is entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us," Heb. ix. 12; so the heart is eased of its burden, and the purged conscience, instead of being filled with dread and amazement, and "a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation," rejoices before God in the holiness and merit of that blood; so "God is just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus," Rom. iii. 26; so he is "faithful"—to his word and promise, and "just" to himself and to us—"to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John, i. 9; so he is the reconciler of his name, "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious," and yet, "by no means clearing the guilty; forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," but, at the same time, appearing in all the majesty and sovereignty of a judge and lawgiver, against sin, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; laying the punishment of it in full measure upon his own dearly beloved Son for the satisfaction of his justice, and "to the praise of the glory of his grace," delivering him up for us all, because he only could bear it.

II. We are next to show "the influence of this grand Gospel remedy upon the temper and practice of all true believers." It is a precious antidote against the fears of an awakened, guilty conscience; sustains the fainting soul amidst all its weaknesses and imperfections, and is the only remedy we have to fly to when we are so unhappy as to fall into sin. But if we plead it for living in sin, we turn it into poison; it cries against us for vengeance, binds every sin upon us, and is the seal of our damnation. Christ's peace is a glorious article of our faith, but can never be peace with sin; and the Scripture knows of no "grace of God which bringeth salvation," but that which "teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," Tit. ii. 11, 12. It does so teach us; and I pray God you may observe, and know by your own experience, that it does it with great efficacy. It is the beginning and seed of a new life of holiness; and the same Spirit which opens the grace of God to the heart, fixes it in a state of willing subjection to him. Faith says, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" from a sense of its obligations to him, and is powerfully constrained by his love to keep his commandments;—and the obedience we pay on this principle is both pleasant to the soul and acceptable to God. When "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works," we are carried to them with the stream of our inclination, and have the greatest of all satisfactions, to know that we serve God with a measure of delight, as well as from a sense of duty. And the service we thus perform is well pleasing to him; who, as he calls for the heart, accepts nothing at our hands but what comes from thence. See, now, what advantage we have in the faith of Christ crucified, for making all we do a free-will offering to God from the

ground of a thankful heart. You that believe the Gospel know, that when you must have lain for ever under the weight of your sin, for any thing you could do to help yourself, God did not take the forfeiture of your soul; he did not give you up to condemnation. He pitied, he spared, he saved you by a great deliverance. He sent his Son, in the likeness of your flesh, to take the curse of your sin upon himself; he must have died for *you*, if there never had been another sinner in the world; and for the joy of redeeming your soul from death, "he endured the cross, despising the shame." Oh! let me speak a plain word: where is your love, where is your gratitude? How can you be the basest of all creatures, or come any thing near that severe censure of grieving his heart, and crucifying him afresh, by doing what he hates, taking part with his and your greatest enemy, and cleaving to the sin which forced that astonishing, bloody sweat from him, nailed him to the cross, thrust the spear into his heart, and brought the anguish of hell into his spotless soul? I say, here is all possible advantage for the desire and love of holiness; here is the will's turning to God, and, in the Spirit's hands, the strong bowing of its stubbornness; here is such a call to the heart, and such a sacred bond upon it to love the Author of our salvation, and to show it in the way he so earnestly requires, by keeping his commandments, as no believer can resist. If it were possible that you could have half so many obligations to any man upon earth, you would think yourself bound to make some suitable return, and scorn the imputation of ingratitude, or enmity, to your benefactor. And, therefore, if you can be unmoved and insensible where you have received more than tongue can express, or heart conceive; if you can live in opposition to the known will of your dying Saviour, and in spite of his most affectionate

intreaties; it is evident, at once, that you do not believe in him.

In conclusion, hear what St. Peter says, "as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Now, mark what follows; "if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." If the grace of almighty God is pleasant to your souls, as your sole relief from the greatest of all burdens, a conscience labouring under the sense of his wrath for sin; then, surely, you will not turn back to your former state of guilt, by disobeying and forgetting him, and living unworthy of your high calling; but will endeavour, above all things, to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

SERMON X.

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. Ephes. i. 19, 20.

THE resurrection of Jesus is the chief corner-stone of our religion, and a principal ground of our faith in him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. If he, who was crucified as a malefactor, had not risen from the dead, we could have had no reason for believing in him as sent of God to be the Saviour of mankind. As he did rise from the dead, he was thereby declared to be the Son of God with power; and our faith in him stands firm on

that foundation, and is established beyond all reasonable possibility of a doubt.

This is a most important article of our faith, and as great a stress is laid upon it in Scripture, as if it was almost the only point offered to our belief and consideration. When Matthias was to be chosen into the place of the traitor Judas, St. Peter thus declares the nature and end of his office and apostleship: "Of these men which have accompanied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained with us to be a witness of his resurrection." And, accordingly, the apostles, in their preaching and writings, always insist upon it as a capital point of belief; "witnessing both to small and great; saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead."

But, besides the necessity of establishing this great point of Christ's resurrection from the dead, for the belief and assurance of mankind that he was the Christ, ordained and sent of God to redeem us from sin and death, St. Paul here takes a step farther, and enters deeper into the nature, effect, and power of it; teaching us that *Christ's* resurrection is *our* resurrection; or, that all believers, as members of his body, were raised *in* and *with* him; and that, in right and virtue of *his* resurrection, *they* are known of God as quickened together with him, and set beyond the power of the grave, which can no more hold *them* than it could *him*. For of all such Christ spake these words, "Whosoever liveth, and believeth in *me*, shall never die;"—the meaning is, they are *already alive* in *him*, to live eternally, by believing; the death and departure of the righteous out of this world, being

only a falling *asleep;* and the state of glory they enter upon, a continuance of that same life which was *begun* in them here. In full agreement with which St. Paul's prayer for us is, "that we may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." The opening of the words, therefore, will give me occasion to speak,

I. Of the peculiar nature, manner, and certainty of the resurrection of believers; and to show in what sense, more especially, life and immortality have been brought to light by the Gospel.

II. From hence to take a view of this great work of power, and of the glory of Christ in the accomplishment of our resurrection.

III. What is to be done in us and by us, that we may attain to it.

The Lord grant unto us, that we may all make the holy apostle's prayer our own; and beg of God with the same fervour and earnestness of desire with which *he* prayed for us—"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of *him*, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what is the glory of his inheritance in the saints."

I. I am to speak of the peculiar *nature, manner,* and *certainty* of the resurrection of believers; and to show in what sense, more especially, life and immortality have been brought to light by the Gospel. Observe, it is said,

"the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward," viz. in respect of our resurrection, "according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead," and in him all believers; for he is speaking of the power of God as exerted for *us*, and working on *our* behalf, as he explains himself a little farther on. Mankind, he says, "were dead in trespasses and sins," under a sentence of death temporal and eternal; in which state they must have continued for ever, for any thing they could do to help themselves. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" so that the method in which God thought fit to help us, and to release us from the sentence of death, was by raising up the human nature in Christ, that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all," who believe in him, "be made alive;" he being our Father for life, as Adam was for death; and because *he* lives, *we* shall live also; and as one brought us to the grave, and the second death which follows it, so the other brings us out of it. We are "begotten again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, who, as he was delivered for our offences, so he was raised again for our justification," or absolute and full discharge from condemnation, because Christ represented us in his resurrection, as he did in his death, and therefore one as well as the other is the grace and power of God to us in him; for it is the power of God *to us-ward* which the apostle here so magnifies. "It was wrought in Christ:" *he*, it is true, was the person raised; but then it was not for *himself* only, but for *us*; that *we* might be raised with him. Here, I say, is the point of admiration, and the great work of his power, that God should effect

the resurrection of mankind in this method, secure it to us, and seal our belief of it, by the resurrection of Christ. Sinners as we are, we are assured by this, that the grave cannot hold us; if we belong to him, death is already conquered for us in him; and with him, by the mighty working of the power of God, *we* are risen again, head and members altogether. To which purpose it is said, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life;" *his* resurrection to life being for *our* benefit, and as certainly *ours* as it was *his*. For the fuller understanding of this matter, it will be worth our while to take notice of one or two passages more; from whence it will appear what was St. Paul's knowledge of the resurrection of Christ, and how much is contained in this article of our faith. In his Epistle to the Colossians, he says, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." They were not dead to the actions and offices of this worldly life, and laid in their graves; but the meaning is, that as believers, taken into Christ, and received to a participation of all he was, did, and suffered, they paid the debt of sin, satisfied the divine justice, and were discharged from condemnation by his death, submitted to for their sakes and in their stead, and so appointed and reputed of God. And as they *died*, so they *rose again* with him, and have their "life hid with him," or safely treasured up in him, though it does not now appear to themselves. But "when Christ, who is their life," and who only can be their life, "shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory." They must pay the debt of nature, as all other men do, and their corruptible bodies must drop into the dust; but, nevertheless, they are born again after the power of an endless life; which, though it is at present hidden from the world and from themselves, they know to be bound

up for them in the life of Christ, who is now sitting at the right hand of God. They are so joined to the Lord as to "be one Spirit with him;" one and the same Spirit belongs to both; and they are members of that body of which he is the Head. As the soul is the life of the body, so Christ and his Spirit are the life of the soul. And though nothing is to be seen in them, as they walk up and down in the world, but what appears in other men, yet they have a life which others have not, in right of Christ; and in virtue of *that* life are now with him in heaven. Strange as it may seem, the Scripture expressly says, of all those who are quickened together with Christ, that "God hath raised them up *together*, and made them sit *together* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Hear St. Paul once more: "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit which dwelleth in you." From whence we may observe, that there is this remarkable difference betwixt the resurrection of the godly and the wicked; the latter will be raised by the sole power of God, to hear that dreadful sentence finally pronounced upon them, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" the godly, or all believers, will rise from their graves by virtue of Christ's life, and the Spirit which now dwells in them, as corn and other fruits spring up in their season. By their being in Christ they have the root and seed of a new and heavenly life in them, which, like all other seeds, has a natural power in itself of springing and rising again in God's time, by being laid in the earth. How should it warm and transport our very souls, to think we may be thus raised and quickened together with Christ, that we may have the life of heaven, Christ's own life, begun in us now in a real, though hidden manner;

and that when it is in us, we can no more be held under the power of death than he was! What a comfortable security is here given us for the performance of these words of Christ; "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand!"

And in this sense, more especially, I conceive it is, that "life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel," viz. by its revealing the precise manner in which mankind, dead in trespasses and sins, and under a sentence of death, are restored to life; that is to say, *in Christ*, and only in virtue of our union with him. It has been thought a matter of some difficulty to account for the assertion, that "life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel;" since the doctrine of a future state was not only believed by the Jews, but generally received and inculcated in other nations. It may, indeed, truly be affirmed, that it was placed in a stronger point of light by Christ and his apostles, than ever it had been before; and *their* authority, to all who own it, is decisive. But neither that, nor the more clear discovery of the way and means of attaining to a happy immortality, as laid down in the Gospel, seem to me to be the thing here intended, as not answering to the plain meaning and full import of the expression. It seems, therefore, to be well explained by the words immediately preceding, which are, "that Christ hath abolished death," i. e. by his resurrection; by which he was made a quickening spirit to all his members, and had power given him to give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him. That is the method, then, of God's ordaining and appointing to convey life and immortality to us, by the resurrection of our nature in Christ, which is asserted. This, it must be owned, was a new discovery, and is an article peculiarly Christian; and as it is repeatedly delivered by St. Paul as his

knowledge of the doctrine of Christ's resurrection, so it is worthy of our attention and belief; gives light to many passages of Scripture, and manifests Christ as all in all to us in the work of our salvation.

II. Which leads me to take notice of this great work of power; and of the glory of Christ in the accomplishment of our resurrection.

It is here ascribed to God the Father as his work of power in Christ, and as if Christ was wholly passive in it, and could do no more towards it than you and I can in raising ourselves from the dead. But, nevertheless, as the actions of the Godhead are equally the actions of all the three Persons; and Christ is, therefore, said to be quickened and brought again from the dead by the eternal Spirit, as well as by the power of the Father; so he arose from the grave by his own power, it being impossible that, as God, he should be holden of it. And when he said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple"—meaning the temple of his body—"and in three days I will raise it up again," he gave them to understand what he afterwards told them, "that he had power" in himself to take his life up again, as well as he had to lay it down, by speaking the breath out of his body. He arose, therefore, and was raised in the power and by the will of the whole Trinity, ordaining and working life for lost mankind through his resurrection, as the first-fruits of that large harvest which was to follow in God's appointed time, and has ever since been ripening in the world. The Lord grant unto us that we may all be growing up to it in the belief and experience of our quickening to an eternal life by Christ. And the single point I would turn your thoughts to, under this head, is his glory in the work of our salvation; as the Author and Finisher of it, accomplishing it himself from first to last. Who was

it that took our nature, that in it he might do the will of God, bear our sins in his own body, wash out the foul stains, and take away the curse of them by the blood of his cross? The Lord Jesus Christ. Could you do this by any will, work, or power, any repentance or obedience of your own? Could you, a sinner in every thought, word, and deed, pay the vast debt you owed, provide a ransom for your soul, and stop the course of almighty justice? You have lost the image of God, and with it your true life: as the fallen children of Adam, you are under a sentence of eternal death, and have made that death your own by sin, and by your own personal transgressions, every day of your lives. Can you reverse that sentence; can you raise up yourselves from this death; can you restore to yourselves the life you have lost? No; but you think, verily, God can; and that it is as easy for him to bring your dead bodies out of the grave, as it was to breathe into man the breath of life, and make him a living soul at the first. He can, he will, he has declared his purpose of doing it; and you and I, though we must shortly die and be turned to dust, shall stand before his judgment-seat as sure as we are now assembled together; but you must also know, according to the light of Scripture, how believers in particular are to be raised: if it is to be a happy time to us, and a happy resurrection, we must be of the number of those who were quickened together with Christ, rise in him from the tomb in which Jesus laid them, and have their life now hid with him in God. For he is "the resurrection and the life," in the sense I have already told you; the life of heaven comes to us only by him, and in this manner; and because we are first alive in him, the Spirit of God taking possession of our souls and bodies, and lying down, as it were, with us in our graves, will raise up all, at the last day, who are to have a share in the resurrection of the just. Christ's

members virtually rose with him all at once; and, by his right, and their union with him, have the same life in themselves which he has, and can no more die than he can. Behold your hope, your comfort, your safety; behold the glory of your Saviour: for it is all his, the act of his love, the work of his mighty power; and when you repeat these words of the Creed, "He rose again the third day from the dead," remember that *his* rising was *your* rising, *his* quickening *your* quickening, *his* life *your* life; and that none but those who are made partakers of it, can have the benefit of his prayer, "to be with him where he is, to behold his glory;" none can ascend into heaven as their own place, and stand at the right hand of God, but in the life he has given them, and the power of his resurrection. It is wonderful to think what a difference there is, even now, betwixt believers and unbelievers, the children of the kingdom and the men of this world; far greater than betwixt the brightest star and a clod of earth. The servants of God are sealed, and have his name written on their foreheads; those who are not, get up and lie down, and do all their business in the world, with the devil's mark upon them; in one, God sees the never-dying life of Christ; in the other, death everlasting. O Jesus! it is by thy conquest of death and the grave that any are made alive unto God; it is thy will that all should be partakers of the glory of it; and thou art now calling to all here present to hear the voice of the Son of God and live. Oh! call to us effectually, that we may desire, above all things, to know a passing from death unto life, and give ourselves no rest till we are,

III. In the way of attaining to the power of thy resurrection. Do you inquire what is to be done in us, and by us, that we may attain to it? You must repent and

believe the Gospel; you must be the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and so joined to the Lord as to be one spirit with him. To be members of Christ, and live by his life, you must be "born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever;" you must know a work of the Spirit, "opening your eyes, turning you from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." You must not think that you are living Christians because you were born in a Christian country, and baptized in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. You cannot but see with your eyes that very many throw away their baptism, and make it appear, by their sinful or careless lives, that they are no better for it. If you were ever grafted into Christ, you are now broken off from him, withering, dead branches. Neither must you think that all is safe with you, because you lead civil quiet lives; and, as you say, do no harm. If you are real Christians, you can say this truly; but then you will not be forward to say it of yourselves, nor give it as your answer, when you are asked a reason of the hope that is in you. If Christ is all in all in your hearts, he will be the first word in your mouths; and what you allege of your morality, and civil honest living, I fear is nothing but a cover for your ignorance, and little better than saying that you have no need of him.—Others say, "they do as they would be done by," and think they want nothing else. Alas! this is sooner said than done; and such men and women, let me tell you, are very scarce. But I must be plain with you upon the peril of my soul; I make no account of these and other such like pleas, and look upon them only as pretences for standing off from Christ. See your sin, and your death by sin, and then you will cast a longing eye toward him. Know that, as fallen creatures and breakers of God's law, you are under

a sentence of condemnation; and you will be glad to hear of release from it, and restoration to life, and the favour of God by the life, death, and resurrection of his Son. There is a work to be done in you, which you cannot do for yourselves, and yet must, of all necessity, be done. You must see yourselves in another manner than you have done, as perishing and helpless in sin. You must know where help is to be had, and be stirred up effectually to seek after it. You must hear the call of the Spirit in these words, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." He must be the pearl of great price with you; you must behold him as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, and your sin; you must trust in him, venture all your hopes upon him, and resolve to know nothing for salvation but him crucified. Look for such a work as this is at his hands, and you will be united to his satisfaction and merits, received into him as members of his body, clean washed from all spot of sin in his blood, live by his life, and be made partakers of his resurrection.

If you have had the benefit of religious parents and a Christian education, and always kept close to God in the faith of Christ, study of the Scripture, and prayer for the guidance of the Spirit, I do not say that your work is yet to begin, or that you stand in need of the same conversion which others do. You would wrong your souls if you gave way to needless fears about the goodness of your state; and I would advise you to thank God for it, and be careful to improve it. But if you have hitherto lived in wilful ignorance of Christ; if you can give no better a reason of your faith than that it is the religion and belief of the country where you were born; if the knowledge of your own case has not been opened to your soul; if the sense and feeling of your wants, as an undone sinner, has not drawn you to him as the Lord your righte-

ousness, and the Redeemer of lost mankind, you are still in the darkness of an unconverted state; whatever you are in other respects, you cannot say in your heart, "I believe in Jesus," and never yet came to him for life. Oh! think *what* you are in such a state; dead in trespasses and sins, without God, without Christ, without the Spirit, without conversion, without hope. Beg of God to make it known to you, and to remove all the hinderances to the coming and life of Christ in your souls. Think what it will be to come to your last hour, without repentance, faith, and holiness, when you are going to be sealed up in your graves, not to rise from them with the life of Christ in you, but to be given up to the second death in the fire which never shall be quenched. Consider, on the other hand, what mercy is offered to us, what a happy change has been wrought in our condition, what glory we may be advanced to, what security we have in the resurrection of Christ for our own, and that by faith in him, and by the same Spirit which raised him from the dead, we are begotten again to his life. When he was risen he said, "Go to my *brethren*"—mark the word, *brethren*—"and say unto them, I ascend to *my* Father and *your* Father, and to *my* God and *your* God," with the fulness of right and compassion for us in his eyes. As he had taken away sin by the sacrifice of himself upon the cross, so he had now destroyed death, and him who had the power of it, i.e. the devil, and his victory over all the enemies of our salvation was complete. Heaven was again opened to us, and life and immortality brought to light by the power of his resurrection: for which reason it is, that when St. Paul is speaking of the mighty force there is in the love of Christ, to constrain all that know it to live unto him that died for them, he adds, "and rose again;" "yea, *rather* that is risen again," as he expresseth himself in another place; *that* being our assurance that what he

did and suffered for us was accepted of God, and that he was made the Lord our righteousness, "because," as he himself says, "I go to the Father." Let it ever be remembered that he carried all his own with him, his children, his brethren, his spouse the church, the members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones; and that he took possession of heaven in their names, and prepared a place for them there, by the very act of going thither. We little think how much we owe to Christ. The greatness of our obligations to him we never shall know perfectly in this world; but we might know more, and consider it more than we do. We cannot but perceive that all comes to us through *him;* forgiveness of sins, peace in life, a happy death, a joyful resurrection, and a crown of glory. We would fain make a great matter of *our* repentance, *our* obedience, *our* good deeds, and make God a debtor to us. Why, we must repent, and turn to God, and do the works of our Christian calling; but we can never be our own saviours. Nothing can take away sin but the blood of Christ; nothing that we do can bring his life into us, raise us from the dead, and procure a place for us at God's right hand. None but the second Adam can remove the curse of the first; not such imperfect, guilty creatures as we are. One sin cannot expel the poison or undo the evil of another; and we should be hard put to it to find one action in our whole lives, which ever passed from us, without some spot of sin on it. God sees our sin, and knows how to deliver us from condemnation; but if we will plead *a right* when we want *a pardon*, we have a fiery trial to go through, and shall know, when it is too late, what need we have of the Saviour,—even thee, O Jesus! for it is *thy* name and *thy* praise; and we have only to ask of thee, that thou wouldst send down the Spirit of grace to seal thy salvation to our hearts; to say in us and for us "that thou art the Lord, to the glory of

God the Father," to raise us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, to kindle the holy fire of love to thee in our souls, to set our affections on things above, and carry us safely through all the dangers and temptations of our mortal state to the joys which thou hast purchased for us. For unworthy we are of thy name, strangers to thy life, enemies to thy cross, and still unredeemed by thy blood, if we are not constrained by thy love to live unto thee. If we lie buried in sin, or the cares of a worldly life, not knowing or valuing what thou hast done for us, nor giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure; if we are prayerless, negligent of Scripture, and not redeemed from our vain conversation in the world; if our resurrection with thee, as thy members, does not prove itself by our spiritual resurrection to newness of heart and life, and keep us close to the work which thou hast appointed for us to do, thou hast told us, that we can have no part with thee. We have indeed, naturally, neither will nor strength for it; but as thou callest us to it, thou wilt not leave us destitute of help; and sin shall not have dominion over us, because "we are not under the law"—which, by giving us up to condemnation for every sin, is a dead weight upon our souls—"but under grace"—which makes thy yoke easy, and turns us to God in love, and freedom of spirit in thy service. For thou art the Saviour in all respects; and as thou didst finish the work which the Father gave thee to do, so thou wilt enable us to walk in the way of thy salvation, and make us know, in this sense also, "what is the exceeding greatness of the power of God to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places."

For I would now observe to you that this, viz. God's

raising us from our dead state in sin, is thought by many to be principally intended in these words; or that it is as great an act of power in God to recover us to a state of grace and holiness, as it was to raise Christ from the dead. It seems to me that the words are to be understood as I have opened them to you, viz. as speaking of the mighty power of God to us-ward who believe, in raising up us, sinners as we are, and dead in ourselves, *together* with Christ, in whom we are quickened and now live, and by his life in us shall rise from our graves at the last day, "every man in his own order" and time; "Christ the first fruits; afterwards"—in the same manner, by the power of the same Spirit, as parts of the same harvest—"they that are Christ's at his coming." But however we understand the words, certain it is, that, in order to a happy resurrection, our lives must be Christ-like, our understandings must be enlightened from above, our wills must be brought over to God, our hearts must be changed, and our affections set on heavenly things. This is the use which is constantly made by St. Paul of the doctrine of the resurrection. "We are saved by grace through faith," as he tells us, and the resurrection of Christ, for our benefit, could possibly be no work of ours; but this gift of God to us will be believed and received in vain, if we are not his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. "If ye be risen with Christ," says he, "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; mortify your members which are upon the earth: for like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." And the improvement he teaches us to make of his discourse on the resurrection, and the victory we have obtained over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ, is, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast un-

movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." St. Peter also, speaking by the same Spirit, has the same advice for all who live in the Christian hope: and I shall conclude happily with his words, if it pleases God that you should take them into your hearts, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things," new heavens and a new earth, or a share in the blessedness of God's people,—"be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless, grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to him be glory both now and for ever." Amen.

SERMON XI.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.
2 Cor. v. 17.

We all lay claim to Christ and his benefits. All hope for remission of their sins, peace with God, and ETERNAL LIFE, through HIM. And yet, among those who call themselves Christians, and expect salvation by Christ, there is, manifestly, a very wide difference. Some are openly and scandalously wicked; some are careless and unconcerned about their salvation, know little of Christ and his Gospel, and will not be persuaded to use the means of knowing more; some are better instructed, and yet, at the best, have but a form of godliness; some are awakened to a sense of their condition, and to cry mightily to the Lord for deliverance; some receive Christ Jesus into their hearts by faith, grow in grace and knowledge, become one spirit with the Lord, and rejoice

in hope of the glory that shall be revealed in them. But still, as I said before, notwithstanding this great difference, both of knowledge and practice, all put in for their share of the common salvation: those who are either vicious in their morals, or totally ignorant of their sad condition by nature, and of the great blessing and benefit of a Redeemer, as well as those who, with greater knowledge, continue in the main just as they were, and stick at the outside of Christ's religion. All think themselves safe, are uneasy to be told of danger where they themselves suspect none, and resolve to run all hazards rather than look out for a change of their state.

Now, the apostle's rule in the text for judging of ourselves, of our interest in Christ, and in the mercies of God through him, is plain; "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Let men think or say what they please, if they are not new creatures, they are not in Christ. And if they are not in Christ, they must be left to stand or fall for ever by themselves, and will have nothing to appear in before God at the day of judgment but their own worthiness. And then their doom is pronounced already. "For no man cometh to the Father but by him" — to a state of peace and favour with God here, or to his glory hereafter. I do, therefore, purpose, with the help of God, to set this matter before you as plainly as I can.

I. By showing you what it is to be in Christ.

II. What it is to be a new creature.

III. The necessity of being so. And

IV. That none are, or can be, new creatures, but by virtue of their being in Christ.

May the blessing of God go along with us, that what I am saying may prove a word in season to your hearts!

I. *What is it to be in Christ?* It is to believe in him, as the person sent of God to be the Saviour of the world; as the one Mediator between God and man, the great atonement, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; and when we come to him in penitence, humility, and a deep sense of our unworthiness, with a full conviction and persuasion wrought into our hearts by the Spirit of God, that without him we are lost creatures, and can by no works, abilities, or attainments of our own, restore ourselves to the favour of God, and rest our souls upon him, as the only and all-sufficient Saviour of sinners, with a lively, thankful sense of God's mercies through him, then we are *in him*; we are received into him as *members of his body*, and have a sure title to a share of his merits and perfect righteousness, as being united to him, and parts of himself; we have a new name and a new nature given to us; we are "born again" of the will of God; our sins are blotted out; our whole state and condition in the sight of God is changed; we are accepted into his covenant of peace, and stand continually before him as children and servants of his family and kingdom, to be filled with all spiritual blessings in Christ. No words can express the greatness and happiness of this change, or the relief it brings to the weary, fainting soul. And if your hearts are unmoved at the preaching of such glad tidings, you may be sure you are still in the deadness of your corrupt natures. Your belief in Christ is an empty profession, and your joining in the worship of Christians a fruitless labour, and an unacceptable service. Nothing is alive in you but the old man with his deeds; you have a heart for nothing but the world. As yet you neither are nor desire to be new creatures; and, therefore, bear witness against yourselves, that you are not in Christ. "For if any man be in Christ, he is a new

creature." As no man, who knows what Christ is, and his own want of him, can come to him with any other expectation or belief than to be raised by him to newness of life; so Christ, who calls him for this very end, will certainly do his own work in him.

II. Let us now consider what this newness of life is, and *what it is to be a new creature.* It is to have the whole bent of our wills, desires, and inclinations turned from earth to heaven, from the world to God. It is to live in dependence upon the Spirit of God; it is to have the mind that was in Christ, and to take him for our pattern in all things, in his meekness, his holiness, his patience, his self-denial, his contempt of the world, his obedience, his universal charity. It is to seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, in the first place. It is the ordering all our affairs with a view to the recovery of God's image in our souls, as the end for which we were made and sent into the world; and reckoning ourselves happy and prosperous, just in proportion as this great design takes place in us, and wishing and praying continually for the accomplishment of it, so as we wish and pray for nothing else in the world. In a word, it is being restored to a desire of loving God with all the heart, and every soul of man for God's sake. This is the new creature in Christ, the new man of the Gospel; what it calls us to, and proposes to make us. And when once we understand what it is, it will help us to know, infallibly, what is not so; and may serve to convince us how common it is for men to mistake the whole business of religion. Outward services and outward actions compose the religion of the generality of mankind. And if we can make a tolerable shift to keep clear of gross vices, and escape the censure of the

world, we think religion has done its work upon us, and have no doubt of the goodness of our state.

Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you. The religion of the Bible lies deeper, and goes far beyond all this. It acquaints us that man is a fallen creature; that he has lost that original dignity and perfection of nature in which he was created; when "God saw all that he had made, and behold it was very good:" that he is fallen from the image, the life and likeness of God, into a state of misery and great disorder: that he has nothing but blindness in his understanding, and perverseness in his will: that the imaginations of his heart are only evil continually: that he is guilty of all sins in one, by loving the creature more than the Creator; wanders more and more from God, and sinks deeper into corruption, till he is awakened to a sense of his condition, and begins to think in good earnest of returning to his Father's house. And, therefore, no kind of outward behaviour only, no decency of a mere worldly life, can reach his case. The cure must go as deep as the malady. And if our sin, in the sight of God, is the alienation of our wills, hearts, and desires from him, they must, of all necessity, be restored to him. If this is the corruption and great curse of our nature, deliverance from it must be the mark we are aiming at. And if we propose any thing less to ourselves, or refuse to go with the Spirit of God into the depth of our hearts, to be convinced by him of sin, to be cleansed from all inward pollution, and renewed again to the life of God, we stand off from Gospel salvation, and have not yet made so much as a beginning in religion. I say it again, we sadly deceive ourselves: the root of the matter is not in us; we are ignorant of the whole ground of our salvation; we do not believe in Christ; we never repented: and

though we may justify ourselves before men, i. e. behave so as that they have nothing to lay to our charge, yet God, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, searching the heart, seeth that we are ungodly.

Look then, my brother, at your heart, where God looks, and by which alone he judges of you, and ask yourself what it is doing? What is the state, what is the one wish and prayer of it? Does it lose itself in a multitude of vain cares, contriving for the world, and setting up its rest here? Does it see and feel no evil in itself, or none that gives it any sensible concern? Does it resist the call of God, and refuse to put itself into his hands, to have the bent of its affections changed? Why, then, I can easily tell you what is the one great wish and prayer of it. It is that very thing, let it be what it will, which it loves and rests itself upon. It is not God and his goodness. Nay, it prays against them; for the bent of the heart is its prayer; and it never, in reality, prays for any thing else, though it repeat ever so many words, either at church or at home, to a contrary purpose.

Suppose now a person to live in the world in high reputation, and who not only does no harm, as all say for themselves when they can say nothing else, but also does much good; yet if the God that made the heavens and the earth is not the God of his *heart;* if, according to Scriptureex pression, he does not walk before him, under a sensible awe of his continual presence, fearing to offend him, desiring to love him, studying to be like him, and hoping to enjoy him, and undervaluing every thing in comparison of a heavenly frame of mind, whatever he may be in the eye of the world, or however he may pride himself in his character, he is *nothing;* yea, he is an abomination in the sight of God. His heart is not right with God. In the main it stands bent against him. Per-

haps he never put up one true, earnest prayer in all his life for conversion, or the blessing of God upon his soul. And if he was to hear the pure Gospel preached—"Repent and believe"—it is probable he would make little account of faith, and turn over the rough work of repentance to others, as being very well satisfied with himself; and be more ready to say, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are," than to enter into any serious consideration about it. And farther, if any should be so officious as to admonish him, in particular, to look well to himself, to suggest to him that possibly all is not right within; that there is a depth of evil in the heart of man which he little thinks of; that every man has naturally his full share of it, and that no man is likely to have the less of it for believing and knowing nothing of it; it is probable he would fly out into a rage, and hate and persecute all such as would put him upon suspecting any ill of himself, or endeavour to take him off his false bottom.

This, my brethren, well deserves our attention. Very much depends upon it, even our acceptance or refusal of Christ. Oh! it is a wonderful discovery which the Scripture makes, if we would but understand it, when it tells us that "they which are in the flesh cannot please God;" that "if we live after the flesh we shall die, and that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Not meaning by the flesh, only lewdness, gross sensuality, or a debauched, wicked life, as we may be apt to think upon hearing these words; but the whole state and nature of man in its present fallen condition, as despoiled of the image of God, and acting only from itself. In this state, the heart of man is a sink of corruption, and odious to God, till it is brought, under the workings of his Spirit, to have that great change wrought upon it, which the Scripture calls our passing

from death unto life. And what can this conversion and newness of life consist in, but ceasing to be what we were before, and having new thoughts, new desires, new affections, new resolutions, new actions: so that a man can truly say of himself, "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. Whereas I was once, if not a wicked, yet a careless liver, and served God without knowing why I did so; whereas I had cold and lifeless notions of Christ and his religion, and of my own great concern in it; desired nothing for myself so much as ease and convenience, and worldly prosperity; knew nothing of my wretched condition by nature; and instead of humbling myself before him, proudly challenged as high a place in his favour as any one; and never considered the great sin of being given up to the creature, and estranged in my heart and affections from the God that made me to be happy in him, and who, as much as he loves me, can make me happy in no other way; I am now convinced, by the light that is given me, that this was all a time of darkness and sad delusion, and that I was in danger of perishing in it. And, therefore, I embrace God's offer of mercy to me in Christ, as a seasonable relief; and resolve to look well to my interest in him, whatever becomes of all my other concerns, and to give myself wholly up to the guidance of his Spirit; to have my soul and body sanctified, and made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light."

This, I say, is a blessed experience, and a great change for the better. This, indeed, looks like the religion of the Gospel. Now comes on the time and state of prayer. Now the soul is athirst for God, gives its strength to him, knows that every thing else in comparison is vanity, and less than nothing, and can rest no where but in him. And whatever comes short of this

thorough change of our thoughts, wills, and affections, can give us no comfort, nor afford us a well-grounded assurance of God's favour. For though Christ alone is "our righteousness," and when we have done all we can, we have nothing to plead before God for our salvation but his all-sufficient merits and perfect obedience; yet holiness of heart and life is our necessary qualification for happiness, and what we come to Christ for; we receive forgiveness in order to it, and he sends down the Holy Ghost to work it in us; "for without holiness no man shall see the Lord." — But this leads me to show,

III. *The necessity of being a new creature.* And all Scripture proclaims aloud, "that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." It is just as necessary, as it is for us to be happy in God; for one cannot be without the other. "The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." The end of all God's commands to men, and of all his dealings with them, from the beginning to the end of time, is to establish them in the heavenly grace of charity, or a sincere love of God and man, seated in the heart, and working as a living principle. This is our renewal to the image of God; "for God is love." This is the end of God's calling us in Christ, and the end of our coming to Christ, if we know what we come to him for. If we would not deceive ourselves, the foundation of all we expect from him must be laid in repentance, and a hearty trouble for the evil of our state and nature. And when this concern is real, it will necessarily be attended with an earnest true desire to be delivered both from the guilt and power of sin. As we are convinced that the want of holiness is our misery, our fall, our alienation from the life of God, so we shall look for it at his hands, as a

necessary part of our salvation, and receive the forgiveness of our sins from him, as a pledge and earnest of his will to work in us a thorough conversion, as well as a powerful engagement upon us, "to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit." And if we can come to Christ with any other thought or wish than to be made holy by him, and raised to newness of life, we are yet in our sins. They never were a torment and a burden to our consciences; and till they are, we can neither desire, nor believe, nor understand his offers of forgiveness. So that in the process of our salvation by Christ, one step depends upon another: one thing necessarily goes before, and necessarily produces another;—repentance, faith; faith, forgiveness; and forgiveness, holiness. As the first cannot be without a desire of the last, so, if it is sincere, it will certainly be followed by all the rest in God's time and order.

But whatever we may think, or what end soever we may propose to ourselves in coming to Christ, the great design of God is, by him, to recover us to holiness, and restore his image to our souls. As I said before, all Scripture declares to us this one thing; that the will of God concerning us is our sanctification, or such a change of our state, of our whole wills and desires, as may dispose us to seek after and long for God, aud choose him as our portion in time and to all eternity; that so we may be qualified to live in a blessed union and fellowship with him here, and enjoy him for ever in heaven. And this is so necessary in the reason of the thing, that we may as well expect to be saved without salvation as without holiness, or to live with God without the life of God in our souls. This world is the time and place allotted us for laying the foundation of heaven in our natures; and if we do not carry it out of this world with us, we shall never find it in the next. As the tree falls, so it lies. Our

desires, whatever they are, will follow us: and our everlasting state will receive us just what the death of our bodies leaves us, either new men in Christ, redeemed by his blood, and sealed by his Spirit, or full of such tempers as can neither enter into heaven, nor enjoy it if they should. For it is a truth spoken by all nature, and fully confirmed to us by the experience we have of ourselves, that every thing must have in it the life and nature of that world, or kingdom, in which it lives. Our enjoyments must necessarily be suited to our desires. And if those enjoyments are never so great in themselves, yet they can signify nothing to us—nay, they would be torments to us, so long as our natures stand bent against them, or we desire any thing else in a greater degree.

Oh! consider this, ye that forget God, who either say to him, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways, or else, pretending to draw near to him, do not walk before him with a perfect heart. Consider whether this is not the reason why God says to every one of us, "My son, give me thy heart." And again, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life;" because whatever has our heart is our God, let us call or worship what else we please by that name; because according to our desires, so will it be done unto us. And God himself, with his almighty power and love, cannot be a blessing to us, unless we run out in our affections after him, and can say truly, in the presence of Him unto whom all hearts are open, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee!"—"whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is nothing upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee."

We pretend to keep the commandments, and we know we must do it in some good degree: but, alas! what little account is generally made of those of the first table, which relate to God; and especially of the great,

leading command, the love of God! And yet this alone can settle us in a hearty obedience to all the rest; and without this all the actions of our lives are no better than hypocrisy, and the workings of a deceitful heart. Oh! then, stop here, my brethren, and let your minds dwell upon this consideration, till the holy fire of divine love begins to have a being in you. You wish to be happy, and God has all the happiness in store which you can desire. He made you in his image, to be everlasting partakers of his own felicity; when the whole human race was dead to this image, he sent his Son, in our nature, to be the restorer of it; and the eyes of our God and Father are always upon his people for good. But then, at the same time, he kindly warns us not to expect life and blessing from him in any other way than he can bestow, and we receive it; viz. by taking him for the God of our hearts, and returning to him with the whole strength of our desires: and if we resist this method of salvation; if we pass through the world without God, or, which is the same thing, without the life of God in our souls; if we lie down in our graves with nothing but earthly desires and a worldly heart; the mercy of God is at an end with us, and he will neither delight in us, nor we in him, to all eternity!

IV. But who then is sufficient for these things? Is all this change a small matter? And is it in the power of man thus to renew his heart, and change the whole bent of his affections—i. e. to new make himself? No, no more than it was to make himself at the first. And therefore the Scripture tells us plainly, "that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do;" that "without him"—without Christ, "the wisdom of God, and the power of God," enlightening our understandings, and renewing our wills—"we can do nothing." And those

who think they can do great things for themselves, either never tried, or else they are ignorant of their case, and do not know the work that is before them. Dear brethren, if we mistake here, we lose all. We expect light where there is nothing but darkness; strength from weakness; and look for health and salvation where there is nothing but corruption and death. We are *self-sufficient*, and can only be self-saved, i. e. miserable, and left to perish by the work of our own hands.

As newness of life is necessary, so it is as necessary that we should put ourselves into the hands of God for it. It is this sense and conviction which brings us to him hungering and thirsting, and casts the soul upon him with all the strength of its desire, for that change which he alone can work in it. It is the knowledge and belief of this, which makes Gospel mercy and Gospel power so welcome and seasonable a relief to us. It is the hearty persuasion and inward feeling of our helpless state in sin, which constitutes the very life and spirit of prayer; and if it is not working at the bottom of all our prayers, they will be no better than a fruitless, dead formality, and can never work us one jot nearer to God. "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." Little children are without strength and without knowledge, weak and ignorant, have every thing to learn, receive what is taught them with undisputing simplicity, and are incapable of thinking, acting for, and governing themselves. Just thus we should judge of ourselves. We are mere children in respect of any knowledge we have of our proper happiness, or ability to attain it. And this child-like, humble disposition is our necessary preparation for receiving the salvation of God—so called, because it is all his gift and his work. And neither the book of our own heart nor the book of Scripture has been opened to us, till we are

brought to this conviction—"that we are *his* workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."

To him then let us go, who is *the way, the truth,* and *the life.* He hath shown us the way that we should walk in, by his teaching and example; he hath discovered to us the truth of God, and the real truth of our case; and if we receive him into our hearts by faith, he will be all life and power in us; he hath redeemed us by his blood, and will quicken us by his Spirit; by him we have again access to the Father, and in him we are accepted; he hath fulfilled all righteousness for us, and by taking us into a blessed union with himself, will work all righteousness in us. Indeed, if the Gospel had only acquainted us with our condition, and left us to ourselves to mend it as well as we could, we might well lose all heart, and sit down in despair, upon sight of the great difficulty of our work. But when it is all glad tidings, and all comfort to fallen, sinful man; when God prevents us with his mercy, and calls us to receive a covenant of peace from him in the blood of his Son; when he engages himself to do his own work in us—"to create in us a new heart and a new spirit, and to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"—what should hinder us from putting ourselves cheerfully into his hands, to do for us what he knows to be so necessary, and to receive what he is so ready to bestow upon us? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Let this be the stay of our souls, when they are fainting, at any time, under a sense of their backslidings and infirmities—"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"—faith in his mercies; trust in his promises; a joyful victory over sin; a will to obey him; a heart to love him; and, in the end, everlasting life. Let us then, through the whole progress of our Christian warfare, cast ourselves upon him in patience and humi-

lity; and let us never be so foolish as to set bounds to his power, or expect less from him than he promises: for if he gives little, or does not give at all, it is because we do not bring along with us the requisite conditions of receiving it, faith and repentance, a sense of our want of what he promises, and an earnest desire of it. Christ stands over every soul with the same compassion that he did over the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, and says, "Wilt thou be made whole?" And if we are not, it is either because we refuse to know our distemper, or have found out some way of our own of healing ourselves slightly, and in both cases reject his assistance: and then we must be content to continue, in the main, as we are, and be what we can make ourselves in our own strength; for as every man that is in Christ is a new creature, so there is no being so without him.

To conclude. It behoves all to enter into a deep consideration, whether we are seeking after salvation by Christ, and have, indeed, brought our souls to him, to be washed in his blood, and renewed by his Spirit, or not: nor think it strange that I should put you, who are baptized in the name of Christ, and call yourselves Christians, and join in the acts of Christian worship, upon this work; for it is notorious that many who do all this are a scandal to the name of Christ; and that very many others, though not openly wicked and immoral, yet know nothing of themselves, and of their want of Christ, and therefore do not believe him. Till men are moved by the sight of their corruption and great weakness under it, to pray for the grace of conversion, and cry mightily to the Lord for deliverance, there is nothing but spiritual deadness in them, whatever they may do, or appear outwardly. The greatest of all wants is the want of a sense of them. And in the want of this sense, all our religion, all our confession of sins, all our

prayer, all our praises, are nothing but a mocking of God, and a deceiving of ourselves. We shall, at the best, only divide Christ, and put in for our share of the forgiveness that is by him, without any desire of his "holiness, without which no man can see the Lord."

"Christ came into the world to save sinners," and he invites sinners to come to him, and must receive men as sinners, if he receives them at all; "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." And for ever blessed be his mercy, that there is "now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus:" but then we are not accepted to the remission of sins, and to a holy fellowship with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, that we *may continue* sinners. No one, who has looked into the Bible, can possibly think otherwise of it, than that it requires of us not only real holiness, but very high degrees of it. And though there is no merit in the highest degree of it, though our whole salvation, from first to last, is of Christ, and no man must think to challenge it at the hands of God for any thing that he is or does; yet real Gospel holiness, the inward fear and love of God, purity of heart and life, universal charity, and a patient waiting for the kingdom of God, in continual prayer, and longing for the power of the Holy Ghost, is the end of our high calling in Christ, absolutely necessary to our well-being as Christians here, and for the enjoyment of that everlasting state of happiness in heaven, which God hath prepared for them that love him. And "blessed are they who thus hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." They shall, in some measure, be filled with what they hunger and thirst after; and find, to their unspeakable comfort, that "the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; and that if any man be in Christ, he is, and shall be, a new creature," as sure as the power of God can make him so.

"Now to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb who was slain, and hath redeemed us by his blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation, and people, and to the eternal Spirit, by whom we are sanctified and made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light"—be glory, honour, and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XII.

I have set God always before me. Psalm xvi. 9.

I MAY venture to recommend this short saying to you as the rule of happiness, the right frame and health of the soul, its present capacity for enjoyment, and the earnest and foretaste of its future perfection and glory. I would not, however, be understood to speak of this happiness as if I thought it was complete and unmixed; which would be only deceiving ourselves with a vain expectation, and engaging in the pursuit of what is not to be found in the land of the living: for we are in a fallen state, in a world lying under the displeasure of God for sin, and must share in its troubles and calamities. We must be daily spectators of the wants and sorrows of others; and in our turn be wounded with the sharp arrow of affliction, in the pains and sicknesses of the body, disappointment in our best hopes, or the death of friends and relations; and grieve, not least of all, for the sin that dwelleth in us, knowing it to be poison in our blood, the curse of our natures, and the cause of all our miseries; so that, though a prevailing regard to God, steady choice of his will, communion with him, looking up to him in all we do, will be a blessed means of mitigating the greatest

evils which can be laid upon us, it will not change their nature; though it may lighten our burden, it cannot wholly remove it. In spite of all our efforts, we shall find that stoical insensibility is impossible; pain will be painful, and God intends it should be so to answer his ends in sending it; the gout, or stone, will be felt; a sudden reverse of circumstances will put our spirits to the trial; the loss of husband, wife, or child, will extort a cry from us, or make us groan inwardly; and when we have done the best we can to guard against the excess of sorrow and vexation, we can do no more; we must still abide by Job's declaration — "Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble."

Neither, in stating the account of our happiness, and proposing the words of the text as the rule of it, and the best method of attaining it, would I forget what the Scripture emphatically calls our "hope," and "strong consolation," the Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, he is comfort indeed! A firm belief in him for the remission of sins, and acceptance to a state of favour and sonship through *him*, is the richest cordial of life; and if we do not lay him for our foundation, a fabric of our own raising, with no other materials than the stock of nature can furnish, will be light as air, liable to be shaken with every blast of adversity, and nothing but self-flattery and fond delusion. In his school, therefore, we must learn this lesson, as we shall, with great advantage and certainty of success, if we proceed upon Scripture grounds. He himself is the very person here speaking, or David of him in the spirit of prophecy, — "I have set God always before me; for he is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall." And as he is our pattern in all things, so we cannot be deceived in following his steps, and adopting the rule of his conduct. What supported him in the great work he had to do, will also support us in ours;

and on this ground we may stand as firm, and be as happy as it is possible for us to be in this suffering state of mortality. I say again, suffering state; for so it is represented to us by the pen of an inspired writer, who was himself the most competent witness, and the most striking example in the case that ever lived; and he was directed to deliver his experience to the world in one whole book, (Eccles.) and to sum up all in a few melancholy words, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit;" but at the same time to point out to us an excellent means of support, on the same infallible authority — "Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man;" and therefore, certainly, his happiness.

So then there is hope, there is relief to be had against the pains and sorrows of life. If we have the wisdom to "set God always before us," seeing him at our right hand, living under his eye, taking him into our hearts, and ordering all our thoughts and designs with a view to his approbation, they will be greatly alleviated and sweetened to us in the worst condition of life: if we do not, the best is vain, uncomfortable, and hopeless. We have good warrant for pronouncing this to be the way of happiness, and the divine art of taking out the sting of that trouble which we must all experience in a greater or lesser degree.

But say the advocates for pleasure, (at least inwardly and in thought,) "We will study nothing so much as the gratification of our senses, and how to possess ourselves of the means of securing that enjoyment. Pretend what you will, there can be no happiness in denying the call, and maintaining perpetual opposition to the strong bent of nature." This thought lies close at the hearts and governs the lives of much the greatest part of mankind; though, common as it is in fact and general practice, it is too gross to be openly avowed, or spoken in plain

words. A sober heathen would be ashamed of it; and a Christian, who purposes and acts thus, and more especially if he pleads for it, is utterly unworthy of the name, plainly contradicts the express doctrine and whole design of the Bible; and if he persists to the end in this sordid persuasion, lowness of taste, and mean pursuit, lives and dies, I do not say a beast, but ten times worse, a fool and an unbeliever. A mistake in this point must be fatal; and therefore an attempt to assist those who are involved in it to recover themselves from their error, is the business of this place. The method I shall take for that purpose will be, not by exposing the several vain pretensions of "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life;" but to present the opposite truth to their view, that, if it pleases God, they may be struck with the lustre of it, bestow a serious thought upon the end they propose to themselves in life, and begin to compute the difference betwixt the name and reality of pleasure.

The Christian says, in imitation of his Lord and Master, whose words I told you they are, "I have set God always before me." He does it in every respect in which the knowledge of God can be useful to him, or subservient to his present and future happiness, that he may act suitably to every relation in which he stands to him, as his Maker, Preserver, Governor, and Judge; his greatest Friend, and continual Benefactor; his chief enjoyment in this life, and complete felicity in the next; or, to reduce this copious subject into as narrow limits as I can, "he sets God before him" more especially in his *commands* and in his *love*.

I. In his commands.—The very name of God, at first hearing of it, stamps an absolute authority upon his commands, far beyond those of earthly superiors; and, strictly speaking, the commands of magistrates, parents,

masters, are chiefly binding in reference to his will and pleasure, as the fountain of all authority. His right over us is unquestionable; and his justice, wisdom, holiness, his independence, and eternal, infinite enjoyment of himself, all conspire to render his commands sacred, and oblige us to obedience.

1. I say, his absolute sovereignty and supreme dominion over all are evident and unquestionable. You may be blinded with sense, and enslaved by evil habits; you may darken and stupify all the faculties of your souls to such a degree, as to forget him, to neglect or despise his commands, and be unconcerned about the consequence of such horrid depravity; but you can never so put out the eye of your reason as to dispute his authority; you cannot say to your hearts, if you would, that he has no right to govern the creatures he has made. You may pretend a difficulty of knowing what his will is, or take a step farther in iniquity, and raise a doubt whether he is not an idle spectator of what is doing in the world, or has any will respecting the good or evil of our behaviour; but if you suppose he has, you cannot persuade yourselves but that he intended it should be a law to us. In what manner soever he has declared his will, whether in his word or by the light of nature, you can never believe that he will suffer it to be resisted and controlled, or that he is the only Being in the world who is not concerned for truth and justice. When you have done all you can to drive him out of your thoughts, to disregard his authority, and shake off your allegiance to him, he will still have this witness in the conscience, "I am the Lord thy God." And when you hear him saying, Thou shalt do this, Thou shalt not do that, contradict his will, and be happy if you can.

2. But his sovereign authority and justice are also directed by *infinite wisdom;* which is a very strong reason

for our choice of his will, and cheerful submission to his commands. If we were to consider him as acting only from mere will and pleasure, and having power to enforce whatever he enjoins, this might strike terror into our spirits, and fill us with a tormenting, slavish awe of him. But we cannot separate his commands from his wisdom, nor does he expect that we should "set him before us" but as the God of all perfection, and with this farther knowledge of him, that we shall be well and wisely governed. Think how unfit it is that a child or a fool should be left to itself, and you will perceive the difference betwixt what God chooses and ordains for us, and our own conduct and management of ourselves, under the influence of headstrong appetites, blind passions, and worldly tempers. Think how eligible and happy it is to live under a wise government, and wholesome laws regularly executed, rather than in a state of wild confusion, where every man is at liberty to do what is right in his own eyes, without law or restraint, and you will have some faint conception of the superior excellence of God's universal government, and the much greater happiness of living in subjection to it. Think of his commands as proceeding from unerring wisdom, and you will see the fitness and necessity of every one of them; you will be convinced that he has revealed and appointed them as the means of our happiness, and feel a secret pleasure in reflecting, that whatever is the state of the country we belong to, whether it is better or worse ordered than many others, it is every man's own fault if he does not live under the best and wisest government in the world.

3. Again; God's commands are, and cannot but be, *holy*. Alas! this is the great quarrel we have against them. They are too pure for us, and, as striking at the root of that sin which has got possession of our nature, the object of our dislike and aversion. But if we "set him

before us" at all, it must be as an holy God, hating sin, and willing the destruction of it wherever it is found, or of the sinner for it. The character given of his law is, that it is "holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." It is the outward manifestation of his nature to us, for our imitation, and as the standard of our perfection and happiness. He is happy only, and for ever, in the contemplation and enjoyment of his own holiness; and, short-sighted as we are, we cannot but discern that the refusal of his commands, and a will contrary to his, must necessarily lead to and seal us up in misery. We can entertain no other thought of him but that he demands obedience of us in mercy, for our great benefit, because it is our likeness to him, and the sole way in which we can take delight in him, or have any true enjoyment of ourselves.

4. Especially if we consider once more that he is *independent* of all his creatures, eternally glorious, happy, and perfect in himself; and as he could have no design in bringing us into being, but that he might communicate his goodness, and make us partakers of his own blessedness, so he reveals his will to us, and requires our conformity to it, for no other reason but that he may conduct us to this end. "If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? Or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou to him? or what receiveth he at thine hand?" saith Elihu, in the book of Job. Why then, O man, is he so urgent with thee for thy obedience? Why does he call so loudly and affectionately to thee to repent, and turn from thy foolish wanderings, but merely in pity to thee, and because he knows thou art a lost creature in thy own choice? Why does he tell thee of his will, and spread his commands before thee, but that thou mayest take him for thy guide, set him before thee in *them*, and, in so doing,

be as happy here as thou canst, and in the way of everlasting happiness?

Sin, which brought death into the world, has not lost its nature, and is sure to plague and punish us. It is bitterness in the cup of life which no art of man could ever sweeten. It is both the worm at the heart, and the rod in God's hand; for there never was a calamity upon earth which must not be placed to its account. Whereas a sensible fear of God will greatly allay the smart of evil; the justice of it will be owned, the use of it will be seen; and comfort taken from this consideration, that it is not only necessary, but tempered with mercy. At all other times and seasons, integrity of mind and conscience is certainly the proper disposition for enjoyment; and we may venture to affirm, that one will always be in proportion to the other. Where it fails, the obedience is outward, constrained, or partial; which, as it is not answering the design of God in giving his commands, so we must not expect to have our happiness much promoted by it. If we suffer our hands to be tied, and are kept within bounds by them, it will indeed be better for all about us, and for the world in general. But God, who requires that our obedience should be a free-will offering to him, and knows best in what way it will be beneficial to ourselves as well as others, goes farther with us, and lays his command upon the heart. The man, therefore, who "sets God always before him," looks there too, sets him before his heart, searches it in his presence, strikes at the root of evil in himself, and bends all his endeavours to bring his inclinations over to his duty, in all cases, at all times, with respect to every command. Easiness of natural temper, regard to reputation or worldly convenience, is not satisfaction in the point to him. These are merciful restraints which God lays upon some in the methods of his providence or common grace, but, in the

main, unsteady principles of action, sometimes holding us in, at other times overborne by the force of temptation, and not the ground of that peace which they have who love the law of God. That foundation is laid much deeper, viz. in renewing, sanctifying grace, and a consciousness of heart that we sincerely and solemnly purpose to do the whole will of God, for the command's sake, for conscience sake, for his sake, and with a single eye to please him; thinking ourselves more especially bound to thank him for commanding us, whatever we do, to do it heartily as unto the Lord, reverencing his authority, pleased with his justice, admiring his wisdom, loving his holiness, and adoring him for his gracious intentions towards us, and the merciful provision he has made for our happiness, purely from the infinite bounty of his nature, he being all-sufficient in himself, and standing in no need of our services. So we set God before us in his commands, and this will be a spring of comfort to us in every condition of life.

II. Let us now observe that we must also set him before us in his *love*. Indeed, if we consider the nature of his commands, what their tendency is, what goodness there is in his design of revealing them to us, and binding them upon us, we have full proof of his love, and abundant cause to rejoice in it, and bless him for it, for acquainting us with what will please him, and obliging us to love him, and to consult the general peace and the quiet of our minds, by loving one another. But his love, as manifested in other instances, is distinct in itself, and worthy of a distinct consideration. In setting God before us, we cannot help keeping our eyes fixed upon his various gifts and numberless bounties: the gift of our lives, and the preservation of them; the sun that shines upon us; the bread we eat, air, earth, and seas, all contributing

their several shares to our maintenance and support, and ministering to our delight and comfort—these, and many others, are the common, daily benefits of a kind Providence. And if we consider farther how many wonders concur to furnish us with the smallest thing we want, and what an expense of power and wise contrivance there is in supplying us with a morsel of bread, or one drop of water, insomuch that our thoughts are swallowed up at once in the contemplation; the whole must needs issue in this conclusion, that He who thus *does* good, *is* good; and that such unmerited favours and multiplied blessings can be nothing but the acts and workings of that love which gave us our beings, and is continually proving itself to our senses by repeated miracles in the support of them. Well, therefore, may we be called upon to set God before us in this respect; to admire, to adore, to praise him; to depend upon him; to sit down contented and easy with our lot; to assure ourselves, at all events, that we are in good hands; that whatever he ordains for us,—prosperity or adversity, health or sickness, crosses or the attainment of our wishes,—proceeds from the kindest intention, is managed by the most perfect wisdom, and solely the effect of his fatherly care over us, and steady tender concern for our welfare.

But though the thought that God is love, and has his eye always upon us for good, has happiness in it far beyond any other, or any different schemes and imaginations of our own, still in the main it is but a glimpse of it. And it must also be acknowledged, that such a disposition of acquiescence and complacency in the divine disposals is not easy to attain; especially, as the corrupt state we are in necessarily requires that it should be penal or corrective; and, in order to that end, that we should receive evil from the hands of God as well as good. If this difficulty seems great to us, and keeps our minds in

suspense concerning the universal goodness of Providence, we have help at hand. There is one instance in which the love of God shines forth in all its glory, cannot possibly be mistaken, and is a full solution of all our difficulties. What I mean, is the gift of his Son, and the grace of redemption by Jesus Christ. It is worth our while to understand, and be well grounde din it, that we may set him before us *always*, and *more especially* in the light of Scripture, as the God and Father of mercies, receiving us to a covenant of life and peace when we were under a sentence of death, not only for the sin of our first parents, but our own numberless transgressions, enemies to him by wicked works, and without either the power or the will to help ourselves.

Let St. Paul tell you what we are in our present fallen state of corruption and utter alienation from the God that made us, lest I should be thought to represent it in terms too disgraceful to our common nature. "For we ourselves also," says he,—the Jews, notwithstanding the advantage they had from divine revelation, without and before Christ,—"were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another," Tit. iii. 3. I bring these words of the apostle to your remembrance for these two reasons: because I think it must be taken for granted, that every man, who is a stranger to the love of God in Christ, is in the same condition, and here described in his true character, notwithstanding his baptism, and the highest human accomplishments; and because it is not possible that any man should either form a just conception of that love, or believe it to his own benefit, if he does not first know, in some good degree, the depth of his corruption, and from how great a death it delivers us. But when St. Paul, who, having well studied himself, knew what was

in man, had laid this ground of the great and general depravity which cleaves to our nature, he could proceed to build upon it the doctrine of redemption, and display the grace and love of it from a heart warmed with the sense of such inestimable mercy. For thus he goes on: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." The words are short, but clear and wonderfully comprehensive; and contain matter of such comfortable import to our present and future happiness, as may well engage the most serious attention of our whole lives, and are enough to make any heart leap for joy. They present to our view the whole work and office of the Trinity in our redemption, the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost; and set God before us, that we may set him before ourselves, as the God in whom we are to rejoice now, and with whom we are to live for ever; which, indeed, is the crown of all, the anchor of the soul in the tempestuous sea of the world, and its chief support against temptations, doubts, and fears from within, and troubles from without. And, therefore, it behoves us more especially to set God before us in this respect, and to keep a steady eye upon the end of our course; knowing assuredly, that we have an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven, and that if we make God our hope and wish, our confidence and the strength of our hearts, he himself will be our portion and exceeding great reward.

Hear how St. John, learned in the same school, and guided by the same inspiration, delivers his thoughts of

the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward the fallen race of mankind. "Behold," says he, speaking of it with wonder and great astonishment, "behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we" — we poor worms of the earth, sinful dust and ashes, vile and abominable, lost and ruined in ourselves, that we — "should be called," that is, actually be, "the sons of God;" joint heirs with Christ, the Son of his love; entitled to all the blessings of his family and kingdom, and received to the hope of seeing him in his glory. So sweetly does the disciple who lay in his Master's bosom touch this string of love in the apostolic concert; for so they all speak with one consent: not from any acquired knowledge of their own, for they were in the lowest class of mankind, unlearned and ignorant; but by the light of heaven shining into their souls, and in direct opposition to the wisdom of the world, and all the pride of human attainments. The Spirit was their teacher, and Jesus all their knowledge; Jesus crucified, and rising again; Jesus our great High Priest, Mediator, and Advocate with God; Jesus the Redeemer, first stripping us of every plea of worthiness, or title to justification in ourselves, and then saving us by himself; Jesus our all, the Lord our righteousness, dying for us, and living in us; he whose "name is Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," Isa. ix. 6.

O glorious, infinitely kind, all-saving, all-healing Jesus! O happy, happy thought! that sin shall neither condemn us, nor have dominion over us; that though always imperfect in ourselves, we have relief from the anxiety of conscience in thy merits, and shall be "accepted in the Beloved," Eph. i. 6. Turn the eye of your soul this way, look steadfastly upon the love of God thus wonderfully manifested on your behalf, and if you

have any knowledge of the curse of sin and of your own sinfulness, any wish for deliverance, any feeling or idea of gratitude, any thought of living and dying a happy man, it will turn your whole heart to him, set you all on fire to make him such returns of love as he requires of you, engage you to think of him with delight, and inspire you with a holy resolution of setting him alway before you. See a full proof of what I am saying, and such a lively picture of devotion and clear affection to the Saviour, as nothing but a sense of pardoning love could excite, in the woman who anointed his feet, washed them with tears of repentance and joy, kissed them in humble adoration, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, Luke, vii. And observe our Lord's testimony to the effect and natural consequence of the forgiveness of your many sins; "for," says he, "she loved much." So will you, when you are burdened with your sin, desire his cleansing, and are established in the faith of it. Then whatever God enjoins will be sweetened and endeared to you. You will set him before you always, in all his perfections of justice, wisdom, holiness, to imitate, to praise him, and see a fitness and beauty in his commands which you never perceived before.

Have you any experience of such a change, and is this your state now, while I am speaking? Not consisting in outward acts of customary worship, or duties without regard to God; there is no life, no ground of rejoicing in this: but is it the inward principle, full thought, and steady purpose of your soul, to set him always before you, that you may be guided by his commands, influenced by his love, keep up a constant communion with him, and make every step of your life a nearer approach to the everlasting enjoyment of him? Surely you have found out the great secret of being as happy as you can be, in a disordered, calamitous world,

where all must suffer, be sick, and die; and may pass through it contented, unhurt, well pleased, because you have found God in it, because Christ has reconciled him to you, and because you have a hope full of immortality. If you are poor, or more afflicted than many others, you will study to be resigned, submissive, and even thankful; knowing that your lot is well chosen, and dispensed to you as the very thing you want, and firmly believing that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God." If you have an uncommon measure of prosperity, and great abundance of outward things, you will take care that all around you shall be the better for it, and keep a strict watch over your heart that you do not fall by it, as thousands and ten thousands do, nor turn it into a curse to yourself by putting it in the place of God, devoting it wholly to pleasure, and giving full scope to every vanity of life. You will abhor the thought of injustice, hard dealing, or oppression of any kind; set God before you in every man you meet, and be ready with the thought of what his case requires of you, and how God expects you should behave towards him. And more especially, you will be a diligent, conscientious reader of Scripture, to the end you may set God before you, according to his mind and will therein revealed, and from a full persuasion of your blindness, and utter incapacity to know him in any other way; praying withal for light, direction, and steadfastness, and wondering at the ignorance and bold presumption of those, who, at the same time that they would be thought to set God before them, neither love his word, nor know what it is to open the heart to him in prayer, for the heart and for spiritual blessings. I say, so think, so purpose, so do, so look up to God in the faith of Christ, and what should hinder you from living and dying in peace?

We may, indeed, make a show of drawing nigh to God, honour him with our lips, and be constant, or even zealous, in his worship, without finding any such effect from it as I have been speaking of; but this only proves that our religion is pretence and formality; for if we set him always before us in truth and reality, in the settled frame of our minds, and with full purpose and devotion of heart, this disposition carries happiness in the very nature of it. Our confidence in him will be a blessed support to us when all other comforts fail us; and whatever our temptations, difficulties, or troubles are, it will afford support in proportion to its strength and assurance; especially as it will be attended with this knowledge, that it is the result of faith and prayer, and the work of his Spirit in us. On the other hand, can you entertain a thought, can you frame a wish, of being happy or easy in opposition to the will of God? What is the cause of all the disorders in the world, kingdoms, neighbourhoods, families, of inward disquiet, perpetual restlessness, multiplicity of vain pursuits, and certain disappointment, but that we do not set God before us, nor choose to be governed by him? Why does the hour never come when we can say we are upon a foundation of peace and contentment? but because we seek it, where it never will be found, in the world, its riches or pleasures; do not make his commands the law of our inward parts, nor rest satisfied with his disposals, nor rely on his perfections and promises, nor know him as the God of love, and the God of our hearts in Christ Jesus.

But is it nothing for a creature made in the image of God, born to know, and love, and enjoy him, who draws every breath at his will, lives upon the bounties of his providence, and perhaps is loaded with his favours, to neglect and forget him, to leave him entirely out of the

account of his happiness, and never consider what it is to be a reasonable man and a Christian? I will allow him to be sociable, civil, obliging, ready to do good offices, courting applause, respectable in his station, and amiable in his temper; but, behold! he gives to all their due except God, and perhaps would think it a disgrace to his understanding to be thought a devout worshipper of him, or that he has any dealings with him in the depth of his soul. I say, what is all this boasted excellence of character, however admired by the world? or how can you fancy to yourselves any thing more despicable in the eyes of the Supreme Being, more wretched in himself, or a greater scandal to human nature? And what is it that is substituted in the room of God? Shall I speak the word again for your conviction and astonishment? The ever blessed God! I say, what do you prefer to him, make your great idol, and worship with the whole devotion of your hearts and souls? A miserable world, amusing its sons and daughters with a vain dream of pleasure, persuading them to contract all their views within the narrow circle of time and sense, hiding eternity from them, robbing them of their God, and withal feeding them with empty hopes, and never paying any thing of what it promises. I do not believe there ever was a man upon earth without God, who, in the full possession of all that the world can give him, did not at last lie down in his grave vexed and disappointed, besides being haunted more or less all his life with a tormenting fear of death; and what more can be said to expose the folly of such a choice, and recommend the God of all blessing and comfort to the chief place in your esteem?

Look again at the man who sets God always before him; and may it be yourself! He thinks nothing else worthy of a thought in comparison of him; loves him in

his will and commands; walks with him, as one friend does with another, delighting and delighted; worships him in spirit and in truth; knows obedience from a root of faith to be the essential character of his servants, and the highway to glory; would sooner displease all the world than his Maker; chooses him for his portion, end, and happiness, in time and eternity; and thanks him, above all things, for the gift of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. In a word, he can say, with many thanksgivings, What temptations have I resisted; what follies have I avoided; what remorse of conscience have I escaped; what a precious antidote am I possessed of against the troubles of life and the fear of death; what repose do I find in my soul; what happiness have I in prospect, by setting God always before me! and the language and continual adoration of his heart is, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison of thee!"

SERMON XIII.

For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord. 1 Cor. iv. 4.

St. Paul, who had converted the Corinthians to the faith of Christ, met with great opposition to his teaching and ministry from some amongst them, who endeavoured to turn them from the truth. Alas! no sooner had he sown the good seed, but the enemy came and sowed tares; raising up every where false brethren to call his doctrine in question, and preach another Gospel. Hence came divisions and heart-burnings, some declaring for one teacher, some for another; and, as is usual in such

cases, unreasonably exalting the heads of their own party, and taking great pains to vilify and disparage those whom they did not choose to follow. This grieved the soul of our apostle. He knew that truth was in danger of being lost in the contention, that they would all be hurt by it, and that it would bring great scandal upon the Christian name and profession; and therefore, with tender concern for his dear converts, and becoming zeal for the purity of the Gospel, he writes this epistle to them to remedy those disorders, and exerts all his authority to put a stop to the growing evil. The aspersions which were thrown upon him, he did not regard on his own account; but as he knew that the doctrine he had delivered was likely to stand or fall by the good or bad opinion they entertained of him, he found it necessary, in order to preserve them from error, and prevent their being led away by his opposers, to stand up in his own vindication. "Let a man," says he, "so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." He could not be deceived in his call to the ministry; he had received his commission and instructions immediately from the Lord Jesus Christ; and, appealing to his conscience for his fidelity to him, he could say, in the words of the text, "I know nothing by myself." But lest the Corinthians should take occasion from hence to suppose that he gloried in himself, and was confident of his perfection in the sight of God, he would not suffer them to continue under this mistake for a moment, but immediately corrects it by saying, "yet am I not hereby justified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord." In one part of this declaration we have the duty, in the other the faith of a Christian. And these I shall make the two heads of my discourse; beseeching God to assist me in it, and open what is said to your hearts.

I. Every Christian should know in his own conscience, hat he faithfully and sincerely purposes to be guided by he rule of God's commandments, so as neither to live in ny neglect of any known duty, or in the commission of ny wilful sin.

II. This knowledge of our sincerity is not a sufficient round of our justification, or to be depended on as what ill entitle us to the divine favour at the day of judgment.

I. It should be our aim, sincere desire, and constant ndeavour to have such a conscience, as that we may ay with the apostle, "I know nothing by myself." It true, all are ready enough to say this from the good pinion they have of themselves in the darkness of a atural state, having never seen either what sin is, or hat a strength and being it has in them: but if ever we ay it upon good grounds, we must first know ourselves etter, and how vainly we pretend to this character, if ve never were laid low in our own eyes, and, in the want of it, cried to God for mercy. It is the glory and reat design of Scripture to cure us of this blindness, to liscover us to ourselves, to bring us in repentance and umility to God for the remission of our sins by Jesus Christ, and to convince us of the necessity of becoming new creatures, in the sincerity of a pure obedience, by he power of the Holy Ghost. And the first of these is he first in the order of our conversion. The Spirit opens our eyes to see our sin, and then brings us to Christ for healing in his blood and all his benefits. Every man is hidden from himself, stands before God in he confidence of a falsehood, and is incapable of mercy, let him be what he will in the eye of the world or his own opinion, so long as he denies or excuses his sin.

Do you know nothing by yourself? Do you live in no known sin? Are you watching, striving, and pray-

ing against all sin in the fear of God? Do you set the commandments before you, to guide you into all duty, and be the law of your inward parts? Have you always done this? And if not, can you remember the time when you were made sensible of the danger of your condition, and took up a resolution of turning to God in repentance? I may say of some, I fear many, who hear me, it has been your way, ever since you could discern between good and evil, to put the law of God from you, and harden yourself in a course of impenitence, by flying to vain excuses — as that God is merciful — that the flesh is weak — that none live without sin — that you hope and intend to grow better some time or other, you know not when; — or if you are not one of those fools that make a mock at sin, and go on desperately in an evil way; if you generally refrain from scandalous vices, and have a decent life to plead for yourself, yet you will not be persuaded of the necessity of making deep search into your conscience, of laying the rule of God's word to your heart, and looking for sin in yourself where he does. You will not be convinced of the great and general corruption which cleaves to our nature; and if you never had the grace given you to see and lament it, and bring it before God in repentance, he has damning sin to lay to your charge for your numberless transgressions in thought, word, and deed.

The example of St. Paul himself will help you to understand what I am saying. Before his conversion he was circumspect in his behaviour, made a conscience of his obedience according to the strict sect of the Pharisees, and was so persuaded of the value and merit of his righteousness, that he persecuted the Christians to death for calling it in question, for declaring boldly to all the world, that, in God's sight, no man living could

be justified, and for preaching Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of sinners. You know how he was stopped in his mad career with a high hand, and plucked as a brand out of the fire. And when the scales fell from his eyes, and the light of heaven shined into his soul, what did he then say? Not, as he does in the text, when the faith of Christ had changed him into another man, "I know nothing by myself;" but, "when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." When the law was laid open to him in its whole length and breadth, not only as putting a restraint upon his outward actions, but as reaching the heart and all its motions, he found he had taken a false measure of himself by it; sin was chargeable upon him, and strong in him, and he saw clearly that death was its desert.

See, therefore, how we may, and certainly do, deceive ourselves, till we are thoroughly searched by the law. If we have something of a decent appearance, and generally avoid gross sins, we shall be extravagantly puffed up with it, when all the while we are vile and abominable in the sight of God, and utter strangers to the truth and purity of an universal, inward obedience. Would you then be able to say as he did, and could say truly in his new state under Christ, you must take the same method. You must give up the pride and deceitfulness of your hearts. You must no longer stand with God upon a little difference of behaviour, natural good temper, or civility of manners, which you may have more than some others. You must first know what sin is, and that the guilt of it is upon you. And when, by faith, you "behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and fly to Christ as your only refuge from condemnation, you will then be in God's way of forsaking all sin, keep the mark here set before

you continually in your eye, and have an earnest desire to say, "I know nothing by myself."

This every disciple of our Lord must wish and endeavour to say; for we are not to look upon it as the peculiar attainment only of an apostle, or too high a matter for ordinary Christians. It is true, that, among the faithful followers of Christ, there may be, and are, different degrees of holiness, according to men's different capacities and opportunities, and for reasons best known to God; but if there is not a sincere purpose of heart, with suitable endeavour to do the whole will of God, there is no holiness at all. If there is a reserve for a darling lust, any such halting with Christ as to say, with respect to any allowed sin, "The Lord pardon me in this thing," there is no obedience in the case, even though it could be supposed in all other points to be perfect and entire. So you would think and judge yourselves of a child or servant, who was bent upon having his own will, in opposition to his known duty and your just commands, in any one instance. Consider, I beseech you, what would the state of mankind be, if every one was at liberty to have his beloved vice with supposed allowance from God? At this rate every commandment might be broken; every sin would be carried to its utmost height; every man would choose for himself, and plead an exemption for the foulest crimes, fraud and injustice, lewdness and intemperance, robbery, and even murder. You see, at once, there would be no living in such a world as this.

Again; what is the state of a soul under this persuasion, that the law of God may be altered or dispensed with, but that of rebellion and contempt of his authority? Where is its duty and submission? What is its integrity and love of holiness, if it can entertain a desire, or be

pleased with the thought of opposing the will of God, and allow itself in the practice of any thing which he forbids? Verily, the words of Christ stand full against all such wicked imaginations, and thus he speaks to every man—"It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." It must, therefore, be a first principle with thee, O Christian, never to be questioned, a sacred rule never to be departed from, that as "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good," in the whole and every part of it, so thou canst only be a servant of God, through Jesus Christ, by keeping and maintaining in thy heart a solemn purpose of universal obedience. If you should stand amazed at this, and say, one and all, Who does so think and resolve with himself? Who is thus perfect? Who, then, can be saved? I would ask you in return, Do you *not* thus believe and purpose? Do you, indeed, think that any command of God may be slighted? Do you avowedly retain a will of sinning, more or less, in a great matter or a small? You cannot say this to your hearts. You may be vicious in your practice, enslaved by evil habit, and find it hard to break loose from it; but you cannot so put out the eye of your reason, and much less darken all Scripture, as to persuade yourselves that the law of God may be broken with impunity, or that a soul in such a state is not absolutely unconverted, and in danger of perishing.

Let us, then, observe carefully where our duty and safety lies, and keep close to the words and example of St. Paul, "I know nothing by myself." Your consciences bear witness against you that you cannot truly say this. Do not stifle this conviction; confess that you cannot, but then let it be to humble yourselves before God; and beware of supposing that you may speak peace to yourselves, and sit down contented with your state, though you have no such will or desire. This knowledge should

lead you to repentance, and bring on a change of your heart and whole soul in the great point of your obedience, i. e. so as to be sincere with God, and grounded in this belief, that there must be no exception in it; for that would be a most dangerous deceit, and a fatal hinderance in your way to Christ. If you come to him at all, it must be for the grace of remission, with a sense of the great evil of sin, and of your own sinfulness. But if you harbour an opinion that you may be excused from any one duty, or have an allowance for any one sin, this would not be coming to him to plead a pardon, but destroy your title to it, by declaring your resolution of continuing in rebellion against him. And when you *have* received him by faith to save you from your sins, this persuasion must never leave you, that whatever he commands must be a law to you, and that it is your work and business under him to be improving in holiness, and going on to perfection. You may not attain to it, but you must not dispute his will. Upon the peril of your souls you must neither make a law for yourselves, nor set the mark of your obedience lower than he does; but be always coming nearer and nearer to it, and grieve for nothing so much as that you come short of it.

Who then, I say again, is the Christian? The man who is careless and unawakened, and though he is not amongst the greatest of sinners, yet never thinks in earnest of the necessity of coming to this point with God and his conscience, that he must purpose and endeavour to be entire in his obedience; or he who thinks as he prays, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," strives to come as near to St. Paul as possible, and wishes, with all his heart, to say, "I would not willingly omit one known duty, I would not venture to break one commandment; if I might have my choice, it should be to sin no more?" You may be slow of belief in this

matter, and, perhaps, now pleading against it within yourselves; but, in the meantime, you are trifling with your souls: for nothing less than the truth of obedience, in will and endeavour, is the truth of conversion; and the doom of all those who are so corrupted in heart, mind, and judgment, as to believe and practise the contrary, is already pronounced by our Lord himself: "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, or teach himself so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven," i. e. he shall not enter into it.

But does not St. James say, "In many things we all offend?" Does not even St. Paul say, "What I would, that do I not?" with more to the same purpose, Rom. vii. supposing he is there speaking of himself? And how, then, could he say, as he does here, "I know nothing by myself?" Observe, therefore, and understand, that he speaks, in the text, of the sincerity of his heart and intention, both with respect to his ministry, and the whole tenour of his life. He took the will of God for his rule, without gainsaying, and made it his great endeavour to conform to it in every thought, word, and action, as one that knew he must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. In like manner, we must all look well to the sincerity of our hearts, and have the testimony of our consciences, that we receive the whole will of God, refusing no duty, living in no sin; but faithfully endeavour to walk in the way of his holy commandments, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left. And if we will not submit to this doctrine, and keep ourselves to this strictness of judgment and conscience, we must not think ourselves the servants of Christ: we must not call him Lord, or pretend to belong to him, whilst we are under the influence of a disobedient spirit, and assume a right of pleasing ourselves in opposi-

tion to his authority. We must think ourselves well and happy under his government; and be ready to say, whenever we are tempted to sin, This is against the law and love of Christ; I will not break my faith with him who has so dearly bought me to his service, nor give up my interest in him at so cheap a rate; I must, and with God's help I will, be sincere with him all the days of my life, in doing or forbearing whatever he requires of me. Less than this we must not be aiming at; and the nearer we come to it in the settled frame and bent of our minds, the happier we shall find ourselves in every condition of life; for it may truly be said, that we are only miserable by transgressing the divine commands; and he is certainly the happiest man upon earth who says, in imitation of his divine Master, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God;" and with St. Paul, "I know nothing by myself," as to any will or intention of disobeying God.

I do not suppose that all Christians are in this state, or that they can attain to it all at once; but we cannot be Christians without a purpose of attaining it, more than any thing else in the world; and this purpose of the heart is well-pleasing to God, and will be attended with a blessing. We must keep our eyes steadily fixed upon it, and be always pressing forward. We must not, by any means, shorten the rule of our duty, but take it just as God has put it into our hands, first to judge, and then fashion ourselves according to it. We must at no rate say, This I will do, or that leave undone, when we know what is the will of God in the case. Nay, farther, you must know, that being thoughtless and indifferent in the matter of your obedience, is a very bad sign. If it is not come to be a great and weighty point with you, and clearly the resolution of your hearts, to do the whole will of God, you are not walking with him according to the faith of the Gospel, and want a necessary proof of

Christ's being in you. One great privilege and promise of the new covenant you do not so much as desire, that "God would put his laws into your mind, and write them in your hearts," Heb. viii. 10.

But now when we are in this state of truth and sincerity with God, still we must look for a better hope, and a more sure foundation to rest our souls upon. For our best obedience will be found wanting in the sight of God, and according to the strictness of his judgment; and therefore it would be running a desperate hazard to venture our salvation upon it. As it is the *duty* of a Christian to endeavour to say, "I know nothing by myself;" so we are directed by the apostle not to stop here, but to hold fast the *faith* of a Christian, and say farther, as he did, "yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord." Let us, therefore, now pass on:

II. To consider that this knowledge of our own sincerity, in the highest degree of it we ever shall attain, is not a sufficient ground of our eternal justification, not to be depended on as what we will abide by at the day of judgment. Why? What should be the reason that a person, so diligent and zealous in his ministry, so careful of his obedience, and so clear in his conscience, as Paul was, should not, therefore, think himself justified, or entitled to the reward of eternal life? Hear what he says of himself in another place: "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." And again, towards the close of his laborious and well-spent life, we find him making the same profession of his constancy in well-doing: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; hence-

forth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." You see he had run well; and why, then, should not he, or any other man in the like circumstances, judge he had deserved the prize? My brethren, he knew better, as appears by all his writings. He was the chosen instrument of God to reveal his nature to the world; to declare the universal prevalence and desert of sin; to discover life and death, with the means of obtaining the one and escaping the other. And when he says, "he had fought a good fight," he meant he had made full proof of his faith; and did not thereby intend to contradict his own doctrine of salvation by faith, or build his hope of acceptance on any thing he had done, though it was a hundred times more than those have to boast of who make a merit of their works, and are so backward to understand what he has fully testified, over and over again, concerning the utter insufficiency of all human righteousness. A crown of righteousness he looked for, and rejoiced in the assurance of it; but, mark it well, it was because he had "kept the faith," that very faith of "salvation by grace," which he preached, lived in, and maintained against all opposers.

The opening of the point is this; and, I beseech you, attend. Our obedience, to approve itself to God, must be perfect, according to the strict meaning and full extent of his commands. When he forewarned Adam, that "in the day of his transgression he should surely die," he could not revoke the sentence, in case of disobedience, without denying his truth and justice, and also giving mankind occasion from thence, in all times to come, to slight his authority, and disbelieve his threatenings. We know he did not revoke the sentence. Our first parents died in every signification of the word *death*, in their souls

and bodies, in a temporal, spiritual, and eternal sense; and must for ever have been held under it, if God had not provided a remedy for them in that promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." When we measure God by our own line, and pretend to know him better than he does himself, we have many a plea, both of weakness and wilfulness, to put in against his threatenings, and tell him boldly what we think is fit in every case, and how he must deal with sin and sinners. So the enemy, taking advantage of our deceitful hearts, still plies us with his first subtilty, and easily draws us into a belief, that God will sooner break his word, and make himself a liar to all the world, than proceed to punishment. But this solemn transaction betwixt God and the first offenders stands, at the entrance of the Bible, as a full proof of his steady, eternal purpose, and is the unalterable revelation of his nature and will, with regard to sin. And it is farther remarkable, that the divine wisdom has thought fit to record little else of the history of our first parents, after their creation, and the command given them, besides this particular of their fall, and of his pronouncing the sentence of death upon them; not only that mankind might take warning from hence of his holiness and inflexible justice, but to fix their eyes singly, as it were, upon this one point, and that they might have nothing else to draw off their attention from it.

It concerns us greatly to understand this fundamental article of revelation, insomuch that, if we are not well-grounded in it, we shall learn nothing else from Scripture; neither the nature of God, nor the nature and desert of sin; neither the necessity of redemption, nor the grace and mercy of the Redeemer: for God has but one will and one law, in all ages of the world; and as sure as death was the consequence of the first man's sin, it is the wages of every other sin, in every other man, from the

beginning to the end of time. And the obedience which he requires of us, as the ground of justification, must also be perfect, not according to our own fancies, perverse judgment, and corrupt wills, but according to the rule and measure he has given us. For as "by the law is the knowledge of sin;" so the right knowledge of the law is, that every transgression is sin, and every sin is death; because, "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. And not only so, but the interpretation of it in Christ's hands, Matt. v. comes close to the heart; and if the commandments, any one of them, is broken there, we are excluded at once from the plea of performance, our obedience is gone for ever. It is this knowledge, not as it lies in the book only, or the head, but as convincingly applied by the Spirit to the heart, which humbles the soul, and makes it lie down before God. When we see not only that God has numberless sins to lay to our charge, but that any one of them is sufficient to destroy our title to his favour; this is, indeed, a deplorable case, but, withal, a necessary point of knowledge.

The reason why God never gave any other law than that of perfection, either to Adam in Paradise, or to the Jews at Mount Sinai (and he never revealed any other), is not hard to understand; for, besides that whatever God does cannot but be founded in truth and equity, it is evident, that whenever he gives a law to his creatures, it can admit of no abatement or alteration; because this would, in effect, be leaving us at liberty to obey as much or as little as we pleased. If we knew, upon good warrant and authority, that we might do less than is commanded, or do the contrary, we should hardly keep ourselves within any reasonable bounds. We should be little concerned about our obedience, and make short

work with the law, if we were allowed to suppose it might bend to our convenience or inclination, and that we are not, in all cases, obliged to the strict observation of it. But, behold, God has told us no such thing. He knows his own sovereignty and our interest better. He is ever at a word with us, and says to every soul of man, "Do this and live," transgress and die. If ever there was a sin which might have been spared, we may presume it would have been the first; as all generations were to be involved in the consequences of it, and share in punishment. But, nevertheless, the sentence against it took place, as to the death of the body, and the labour, pains, and sorrows of this mortal life; and the remaining part of it, relating to the death of the soul, was reversed in such a manner, as to show the doom of sin in the strongest light, and vindicate the truth and justice of God in the sight of men and angels.

For, happily for us, it *was* reversed. We are "all concluded under sin," so as to have no way to avoid the charge; we are plainly convicted of it, and liable to its penalty; but not to lie under the curse of it for ever, unless by our own fault. It would be dreadful, indeed, to think we had no relief in this extremity, and were left to perish, without hope and without remedy. But the sight of a world, miserable and helpless, "lying in darkness and the shadow of death," was no light matter in the eyes of God. "He whose compassions fail not, and whose mercy is over all his works," has contrived the means of our recovery, manifested himself to us in all the glory of his goodness, and may yet be found of us as our God and Father. In order, therefore, to understand in what way hope comes to us, how we are released from condemnation, and received to a covenant of life, sinners as we are, let us now turn our thoughts to the Son of God, dying for the redemption of soul and body, making

full satisfaction to justice, and yielding a complete obedience to the law in our stead. Sin was declared worthy of punishment, even death, and death it must have. Perfect obedience was demanded, and it must be paid in full measure. Who suffered what we deserved? Who performed the obedience we could not? Who was the Peace-maker and Mediator between God and man, without injury to law or justice, bearing the punishment of sin, and doing the whole will of God in the utmost perfection, that the sinner might be spared and admitted to favour? My brethren, this is so weighty and essential a point of our religion, so necessary for the peace and comfort of our minds, so happy a truth in itself, and such a loud call to our hearts for suitable returns of love, that if we are not well instructed in it, and made alive unto God in the belief of it, whatever else we know, we know nothing as we ought; whatever we do is of no value in the sight of God. What I mean, is Christ's undertaking for us our deliverance from wrath by him, and acceptance for his sake, "according to the good pleasure of the will of God, and to the praise of the glory of his grace." That one text is full assurance in the point, if there was not another such in the whole Bible: "He (God) made him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." He treated him as a sinner, as the greatest of sinners, yea, as all sinners in one, that by his offering of himself a sacrifice for sin, and perfect obedience unto death, we might be totally and for ever discharged from guilt and punishment. Christ, by the appointment of God, and his own voluntary oblation of himself, hath done and suffered what he did purely for this end, that we might be accounted righteous in and through him, and stand as clear of all blame before God as if we had never sinned. This is the foundation of our peace, and the anchor of

our hope, the great grace and peculiar blessing of the Gospel; the one sole method ordained of God for our eternal justification, and not any lame works, imperfect duties, or scanty obedience of the greatest saint that ever lived. This is the salvation declared to Adam in Paradise, conveyed by him to his children, renewed to believers in the several ages of the world, and at last fully manifested and accomplished in the coming and person of the blessed Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ; and according to this faith we stand or fall for ever. On this ground we are safe; in this belief, and this only, we have full relief against all our fears, and all the accusations of conscience; with this light in our hands we can see the way open for us to heaven, notwithstanding our manifold defects. It must be the way of holy obedience; but not to be pleaded, or trusted in, as full payment to the law, and full performance of our duty, because in its best state it is imperfect, and cannot possibly be accepted for its own sake.

You now see why St. Paul, after the declaration he had made, that he "knew nothing by himself," immediately, and in the same breath, withdraws that plea; you see clearly that no other man must take it up, and that for the reason here given, because "he that judgeth us is the Lord." He does, and cannot but require perfect obedience from us. He will not suffer man to control him, or repeal his law, by saying, Thus much I will do, and no more. If it is broken more orless, sin is found upon us, and our souls are forfeited; and where will it not be found, when he shall "judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ?" When he comes with his rule in one hand, and the book of heart and life in the other, who can abide the trial? "Who shall stand when he appeareth?" "Who can say, I am clean without transgression?" Not Noah, not Abraham, not Job, not Daniel, not David, not Paul, not Peter. Oh! it is a searching word, "He

that judgeth me is the Lord!" "His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," and he "seeth not as man seeth." Every day and hour, every action of our lives, every thought, intention, and purpose of the heart, and every word of the tongue, must be brought to account before him, and weighed in his strict balance.

Will not this shake you off the bottom of self, tear away all your vain confidences, and drive you to Christ, the only rock? You have been baptized in his name, call him your Saviour, and think you believe in him; when in the main you slight him, and make ten times more account of a few acts of customary worship, heartless prayers, and what you call your good deeds, though they are soon reckoned; and none will stand you in any stead, if you have not fled to him as your only refuge from the guilt of sin, and "the Lord your righteousness" in a day of trial. You dream away your lives in the easiness of a superficial blind faith and outward profession; but do not cleave to him for life, having never had the sentence of death in yourselves, never seen the shortness of all your best works and duties, or entered into the depth of this saying, "He that judgeth me is the Lord." But if ever your eyes are opened to see what you have done and left undone, if ever you know a passing from death unto life, the sense of your sin and miserable unworthiness, and of the necessity of Christ to save you wholly, will be so strong upon your minds in the power of the Holy Ghost, that you would not go without him, nor lose your interest in him for the world: you will then know of a truth, that in speaking peace to yourselves, and thinking all safe for heaven, because you are not open, scandalous sinners, and have some form of religion, you trusted to a broken reed. And whoever he is that has no knowledge of Christ for salvation, never was troubled in seeking after him, or earnestly desired his benefits, as I

ar is the case of great numbers, dies a lost man, if he is called out of the world in this condition.

My brethren, be not afraid to know the truth of your state. Your sins are many and great, and may well strike a damp upon your hearts; your obedience is very imperfect, and you must needs be ashamed to present it to God. What then can you do but look to Christ? Bless God that you *may*, and that you have your call to it: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," Isaiah, xlv. 22. Look any where else, look only or chiefly at yourselves, and you will never know peace. Paul will tell you why he was not daunted, but, on the contrary, always rejoicing in the Lord, though he knew he was to judge him: "Being justified by faith," says he, "we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And again, "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Know the value of God's peace, and hold to Christ's righteousness, and you may pass through the world full of hope, lie down in your beds with a quiet conscience, and meet death without fear. Make any thing else your confidence, and where then will be your quietness, assurance, and ground of rejoicing; and how will you ever be able to bear up against the tormenting thought, "He that judgeth me is the Lord?"

But may all come to Christ, and be happy in this trust, that he is their Saviour and Peace-maker with God, their atonement and righteousness? Is this hope for the ungodly and for sinners? Yes, when they know their danger and misery in sin, are burdened with it, and would be glad of mercy; when they come to him for a new heart and a new spirit, as well as for washing in his blood, and can be content with nothing less than his whole salvation. He came into the world to save sinners,

and has none but such to save, and can save the greatest; and this is his praise in heaven and earth. But then the work and glory of his salvation is the mercy of God to us, and the power of God in us; and he cleanses none from the guilt of sin who will not be freed from the love of it.

Observe, therefore, the drift of this whole discourse, and how the two parts of the text hang together. St. Paul could say, "I know nothing by myself." So every Christian would say, and knows that his heart is not right with God if it is not his aim, endeavour, and sincere prayer. You may, perhaps, think that saying this truly is enough for salvation; and, I believe, is what the generality think more than enough: but without Christ it is nothing; and that we are thereby justified, was more than St. Paul durst say. In the faith of Christ he was a new man, but knew, to the last, he could be saved only by Christ. Let us be the better for his teaching and example. Let us learn of him these two great points of a Christian state, the way of justification by faith in Christ, and a pure obedience in the love of Christ. Let us make Christ our trust, and our all, without being concerned at the reproach of an ignorant world, as if this was making him the minister of sin; without any fear of diminishing from our obedience by so doing, or having our attention taken off from the other part of the words, as the rule we should walk by, and the mark we are pressing to, "I know nothing by myself." On the contrary, the two parts of the text confirm and support each other; and the belief that, through Christ, we shall be enabled to stand before God in judgment, is the Gospel means of bringing us to God in the sincerity of obedience, from the ground of a thankful heart.

So faith works; and if it does not, proves itself at once to be false. When we come to Christ for life, hope,

and comfort, praise God for him, and rejoice in the great deliverance he has wrought for us, we shall cleave to him in well-doing. In the belief of his grace we shall keep his commandments. If we take him for our Saviour, we shall take him for our Master, knowing that he is a master who will be obeyed, and choosing to obey; crucifying sin in ourselves, because he was crucified for it; serving him with dutiful affection, and fearing nothing so much as to offend him whom we delight to call our Saviour. When we have laid him for our foundation, elect and precious, and are established in the faith of complete deliverance and redemption by him, not only from the death we are under by the sin of our first parents, but the countless sum of our own, as this matter is presented to our view, Rom. v. 15—17; we shall "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure; and in the hope of seeing him in his glory, "purify ourselves even as he is pure," dreading the vanity of a dead faith, neither fruitful in good works, nor converting the heart, nor engaging to prayer; and desiring to say, with his blessed servant, in the truth of an obedient conscience, "I know nothing by myself."

To sum up all in a word, "in God's sight shall no man living be justified;" but every believer *shall* by the grace of God in Christ. And as sure as we are true believers, "accepted in the Beloved," we shall learn of him to follow after holiness, and give ourselves up to the will of God. May we all experience such a work of grace! May the good Spirit make us all such Christians in faith and purity, that being grafted into Christ by our own choice, act, and deed, as well as by baptism, and knowing how "mercy rejoiceth against judgment," we "may serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." Be always praying thus yourselves, and aiming at it in the power of a true

faith. You may think it hard to have a clear conscience with respect to every commandment, or so much as sincerely to purpose universal obedience; but it is full as hard, first to see yourselves condemned sinners, and then to think you can be justified only by believing. Whenever you are awakened, you will be all for doing; and this thought will abide with you a long time, that you must cleanse and heal yourselves as well as you can. Faith and practice are both hard, and I know not which most: and yet both in Scripture are declared necessary to salvation. We must not, however, be discouraged, and sit down in despair; but do as we would in the case of a dangerous distemper, or broken limb, look out for help; especially as it is promised, and we know infallibly where it is to be had. The consequence is, *Pray*. Go with your sin and weakness to the God of mercy, and the Giver of every good and perfect gift, sure of relief suited to all your wants; and always remembering that "it is he who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure," to the end we may be helped effectually, feel our hearts warmed with gratitude, and praise him for his gifts in time and eternity.

SERMON XIV.

For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the Governor among the people. Psalm xxii. 28.

THIS Psalm contains, in brief, an account of our Lord's suffering state upon earth, of his death and resurrection, and of the happy effects which were to follow, in the conversion of mankind from a state of gross darkness and wickedness in idolatry, to the acknowledgment and wor-

ship of the true God, willing subjection to Christ, faith in and faithful dependence on him for all his benefits. "My seed," says David, speaking in the spirit of prophecy, and in the person of Christ, above a thousand years before his birth, "my seed shall serve him, and shall be counted unto the Lord for a generation," ver. 31. They shall be restored to a new capacity of serving God, and, as members of his family and kingdom, entitled to all the promises he has made, and all the blessings he has to bestow upon his well-beloved children. "All the ends of the world," says he, "shall remember themselves, and be turned unto the Lord," ver. 27. The great salvation here spoken of shall not be confined only to the Jews, who, at the time when David penned this Psalm, were the only covenanted people of God, but published throughout the world, and offered to men of all nations; many of whom would remember themselves, awake as out of a dead sleep, acknowledge their past ignorance and forgetfulness of God, see their unhappy condition in sin, turn to him in repentance, seek his favour, gladly embrace his covenant of peace, and live to his service. "For," at the time of this general conversion and restoration of the world, "the kingdom is the Lord's; and he is the Governor among the people." He who, in right and power, is the sole Lord and Governor of the universe, and whose kingdom ruleth over all, shall reign in the hearts of his people, and be honoured as God by their dutiful submission and willing obedience to him.

In order to secure so great a blessing to us, and recover us to this state of faithful subjection to God, on which our happiness depends, Christ, "when he had by himself purged our sins, and was set down on the right hand of the majesty on high," sent the Holy Ghost to dwell in us, and make all he had done and suffered effectual to our salvation; to instruct and quicken us; to enlighten our understand-

ings and renew our wills; to convince us of our great sin in being turned from God, and bring our straying hearts back again to him in love. As, on the one hand, it is our misery, curse, and death, that we are naturally alienated from God, live to ourselves, and to our own wills; so, on the other, here is a prospect of restoration and happiness opened to us, in our returning to the duty of creatures, and to a state of professed subjection and obedience to the God and Father of our spirits. And we are hereby plainly given to understand, that as it was one great end of Christ's coming into the world thus to recover the hearts and wills of men to God, so it is a matter of the utmost necessity to every soul of man; and, likewise, that whenever it is done it can only be done by him, and in the way of his appointing. For though we should see the necessity of living in perfect subjection to God, and endeavour in sincerity, and with all our strength, to bring ourselves to it, yet our labour will be in vain if we are not first grounded in Christ. This, therefore, is what I am now to open and explain; and I beseech God to assist me in it, and bless what is said to your instruction. Lord, grant that the Spirit, which on this day was given to the world, may breathe upon us, that we may live and praise thee for our renewal to thy image in righteousness and true holiness!

I. I shall give you a brief description of the state mentioned in the text. And,

II. Show how it is to be attained.

I. The state mentioned in the text is that in which the soul, knowing itself to be the creature of God, and subject to his universal dominion and sovereignty, consents to receive a law from him, and submit to his government; in the belief and acknowledgment, that as he has

an absolute right to govern us, so he cannot but do it in the best manner for his glory and our own good. And when this becomes the ruling habit and temper of our minds, and the settled purpose of our hearts, our obedience will likewise be full and unreserved; and for the same reason that we obey God at one time, or in one instance, we shall think ourselves bound to obey him at all times, and in every thing he has commanded, or we know is agreeable to his will. There must be no exceptions to it, and the obedient man makes none. Whatever God is pleased to order for him in the course of his providence, whether it be prosperity or adversity, sickness or health, life or death; whatever he enjoins in his word, and however contrary it may be to his inclinations, sense, or opinions, he is set down in this belief once for all, that God's will must take place, and therefore frames himself to a quiet, cheerful submission to it. For if we should object to any thing he does to us, or command us to do, and plead difficulties when we should be resigned and obedient; what would this be but prescribing a law to him instead of receiving one at his hands, choosing for ourselves, and, upon the whole, withdrawing ourselves from his government? Not but that, in most cases, our duty is so plain and evident to ourselves, that we cannot act against it without being knowingly false to our own interest, and doing violence to our own reason and conscience. But let this be as it may, whenever the will of God is made known to us, our road is before us with a clear light shining upon it from heaven; our duty is bound upon us, our obedience is demanded, the kingdom is the Lord's, the heart of man must submit.

This is that happy state of subjection to God we were made in, and made for, the health and well-being of the soul, our glory and perfection. Departing from it was the sin of the first man; and the great quarrel which God

has against us, is, that we are continually acting it over again, by setting up our own wills in opposition to his, and refusing to be governed by him. He calls aloud to us to consider our ways, has contrived the means of our recovery, and is always ready to bless us in our endeavours of returning to him in obedience; but if we finally slight his instructions, harden ourselves against his warnings, and will not see the extreme danger of the way we are in, we must perish in our sins.

Now, therefore, be sincere with God, and faithful to your own souls, and confess the truth. It is a blessed thing to have the Lord for our God, to be with him as a dutiful child is with its father, to set him upon his throne in our hearts, to have our wills bowed to his service, and our souls wholly turned to him in resignation and obedience; but then this is not your state. You either live in known sin of some kind or other, and have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds of his authority, or else you flatter yourselves that you are governed by him, when you are not. You mistake a decent life, and outward civility of manners, which has no better foundation than natural goodness of temper, sense of reputation, or regard to worldly convenience; I say, you mistake this for conversion to God, and a full determination and steady purpose to live to his will, and be at his disposal in all things, as he shall enable you. You seldom sit down on the evening of a Sabbath, perhaps you never set apart one hour in your whole lives to consider what your duty is in its full extent, what obligation you are under to perform it, and how very much depends upon the right frame and temper of your hearts in this respect. You do some things for the ease of your minds, and to keep your consciences quiet; but there are many others which you leave undone. You do nothing as unto the Lord, under his eye, in pure obedience to him, and with a view to his

glory. Indeed you cannot, till you comply with his method of doing it. You are bound hand and foot; yea, "dead in trespasses and sins." Breath must come into you from above; and if ever you become the children of God, in the newness of a free obedience, it can only be by power from him, who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Which leads me,

II. To show how this state is to be attained. The Scripture is express, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," i. e. without a settled purpose and sincere endeavour to do the will of God from the heart. Not doing this, as it was the sin of the first man, and brought death into the world, so it is the sin of every man; for "sin is the transgression of the law" of God, and "the wages of it" at all times "is death." And to show us the great evil of all sin, and our unhappy condition under it, together with the way and means of deliverance, by removing the curse of it from us, and subduing the strength of it in us, is the design of all Scripture. Now, whenever we have our eyes opened to see the desert of all sin, the greatness of our own, and the necessity of holiness, the first thought we naturally betake ourselves to, and it is as far as our own reason can carry us, is that we will make our peace with God, by forsaking our sins, and a more conscientious obedience for the time to come. Confess and forsake them we must, upon the warning and authority of Christ himself, who began his preaching with saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" meaning, that without repentance there is no entering upon his way of salvation, called the kingdom of God, because by it we become members and subjects of his kingdom of grace here upon earth, and shall be admitted into his everlasting kingdom of glory. But observe carefully, as it is a matter of life and death; he

does not say, Repent, and ye shall be saved, as if nothing more was to be done to reconcile us to God, and secure our title to heaven. This is the greatest of all mistakes. It is a flat denial of Scripture, utter ignorance of the nature of God therein revealed, and the sacredness of his law; which, when it is once broken, subjects us to death, and leaves us under its curse. It is in effect telling God how he shall save us, limiting his justice, and setting what penalty upon sin we please. In a word, it is being our own redeemers, establishing our own righteousness for salvation, and making Christ die in vain.

What then is the soul's relief under the apprehensions of its danger and misery, and where shall we go for help with our defilement and wretched weakness? If we are all guilty before God, and no repentance or endeavours of our own can alter our condition and restore us to his favour, what is the hope of condemned sinners? I beseech you to hear it, and I pray God it may sound sweetly into your hearts: It is, saith St. Peter, "the word which God sent, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, that, through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." "This is the word of faith which we preach," saith St. Paul, "that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead"—and by this convincing proof marked him out for the Christ, thy Deliverer—"thou shalt be saved." "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth," saith St. James. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin," saith St. John. See how the apostles of our Lord, with one consent, declare these glad tidings to a guilty world—that though we are miserable and undone in ourselves, can do nothing to satisfy the divine justice, or recover our first happy state in God, have no works or righteousness of our own to

plead before him, and must let that alone for ever, yet he has come down all the vast distance between us, given his own Son to pay the debt we owed him, made him our surety, our atonement, and righteousness, and in him is well pleased with us; thereby manifesting his nature of love, and making all his goodness pass before us, for our present peace and everlasting salvation.

Stand fast here in fulness of belief; reach out your hand to this cordial; let your soul meet this mercy; receive this grace as grace, under a deep sense of your want of it, and as the riches of God's goodness to you a perishing sinner; say once joyfully, "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus;" and then mark what use an apostle, who was perfect in this lesson himself, will teach you to make of it. "We love him," saith St. John, "because he first loved us." He means that in all reason we should; it is a sacred, strong bond upon us to do it. And we shall do it, if we have any ingenuousness or sense of gratitude; if any thing in the world can oblige or take hold of us. The superabundant love of God, in giving his Son to die for us, when we were rebels, and enemies to him by wicked works, is such a powerful attractive, carries such persuasion in it to win our hearts to him, and bears with such force upon our minds, that we cannot well resist it. If we understand and believe it, our next inquiry will be, what shall we render unto God for so great a benefit, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" Our Saviour tells us, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." As if he had said, surely you cannot but love me, when you consider what I have done for you; and the only return I expect from you as a proof of it, is, that you would put yourselves into my hands, to be created unto good works, and to a new state of willing obedience.

Thus then it is that "the kingdoms of this world

become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and that he is the Governor among the people." Here is our advantage for holiness; this is the Scripture ground of it, and Scripture call to it; and you now see how I have brought this matter to a point. When we are "rooted and grounded in love, and comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, (which indeed passeth knowledge)," the natural and proper working of our faith will be a desire to please God in the way of his appointing; for love is the fulfilling of the law; and those who before were so backward to obey, so stubborn in their own wills, and fast bound in the hardness of an evil nature, will be disposed to receive a law from God, ready in Christ's freedom to run the way of his commandments, and prize his holiness as the health of their souls, and a necessary part of his salvation.

I do not mean that we are sufficient of ourselves either to believe the love of God in Christ, or to walk worthy of it when we do. No; the Spirit must be with us in every step of our progress, to convince us of sin, to work faith in us, to keep us steady in it, and make us lively in our obedience. But then he does not deal with us as so many stocks and stones, or by putting an absolute force upon our natures, but gives in his help in the way of our own reason; that is, by presenting thoughts to our minds, enforcing them upon us by his secret operation, and so gaining the consent of our wills. And this argument of God's love to us is, in the Spirit's hands, of all others, the most powerful to recover our hearts to him, and settle us in the truth of obedience from love.

Let me, therefore, in conclusion, recommend these two points to your belief and most serious consideration, as the sum of all I have said; first, that without the

faith of Christ we can never attain to holiness; and secondly, that if he does not govern us, we cannot belong to him.

1. I have already observed to you what a mighty advantage we have in the sense of God's love to us for keeping his commandments, and how forcibly it draws our hearts and wills to him in the way of a pure obedience; and what I am now farther saying is, that if we are not first well grounded in the faith of his great mercy to us in forgiving us freely, and delivering us from the sentence and curse of the law by the death of his Son, we shall never attain to the holiness which is required of us by the Gospel. Take away this ground, with the Spirit's aid, who lays it, and works with it, and what remains but the corruption and weakness of nature, blind to itself; and when it would set about a work of reformation, bringing it down to the low standard of its own thoughts and abilities, acting by constraint, struggling with difficulties which it cannot overcome, and resting, at the best, in a few lifeless, outward performances? Whereas it is the great excellency of faith to reach and purify the heart; and the love of God shed abroad in it by the Holy Ghost both binds Christ's whole yoke upon us, and makes it easy. If our faith is strong, our endeavours after universal holiness will be sincere and hearty; if it is weak, they will be weak; and just in proportion as we believe the pardoning love of God in Christ, we shall find ouselves disposed to make him suitable returns of love, and live unto him that died for us, in all the duties and exercises of our Christian calling, keeping close to God in prayer, and living as we pray.

And now you see the reason why you are so careless of your obedience, and so little recovered to God in holiness, according to the teaching and example of

Christ; why the breaking of one or more, I will venture to say all the commandments, when rightly understood, is as nothing in your eyes, and gives you no real concern; why you take God's name in vain, and profane the sabbath or keep it only in part; why you defraud and speak evil one of another; why you covet, envy, and bear malice; why the axe is never laid to the root of inward sin and evil lusting; why so many of you, who call yourselves Christians, show little or no regard to the solemn, dying command of your Lord to remember him in the holy sacrament: it is because he has no tie upon your hearts. It is because you never were burdened with your sin; never once cried out with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" — never saw the greatness and necessity of Christ's salvation; and therefore, whatever you pretend, or however you may have been taught to speak, do not truly believe in him as your Saviour. My brethren, lay it to heart; make haste, and escape for your lives; for,

2. If you are not governed by him, as you never will but in the faith of his love, and the power of his Spirit, you do not, you cannot belong to him. He has pronounced the doom of all such, "Those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." Is it then weighty upon your hearts, that all the disciples of the crucified Jesus must come in upon his summons, submit to his authority, and hear the invitation of his love? If ever you call to mind what he has done for you, and how dearly he has purchased you to his service, can you think much to receive a law at his mouth, or refuse him the tribute of your obedience, when you know it is his due, and what he so earnestly and affectionately requires

of you? You would scorn any man who thought so meanly of you, as that you could be ungrateful, churlish, or disobedient to the best friend you have upon earth; and are you the man or woman who slight the almighty love of your God and Saviour, and set yourself stubbornly in opposition to his will? When he says, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; thou shalt not take his name in vain; thou shalt keep holy the sabbath day; thou shalt not do this or that thing which my soul hateth; you turn a deaf ear to him from year to year, hate to be reformed, and will take no warning. And can you be so wretchedly deceived as to fancy you belong to him, and that he will own you at the day of judgment? Upon cool reflection you cannot think it possible. All Scripture is against you. You cannot open any part of the Bible that will not fly in your faces; and I dare appeal to your own consciences, whether they do not bear witness to that saying of St. Paul in particular, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ," to be led by him, "he is none of his," he is no child of God.

Know then that there is terror in the cross of Christ, as well as love; and at the same time that it speaks peace to the penitent and believing, it proclaims aloud the accursed nature of sin, God's abhorrence of it, and will to punish it in every soul of man that obstinately continues in it. And let me beseech you, by all your hopes, not to think confusedly of this point of your obedience to the Saviour, but come to a clear understanding of yourselves. Do you read the Scripture to know what God commands, and what the law is which you are to be governed by? And do you read it with this thought and purpose, that you must and will be governed by what you hear, assuredly believing that the mercy therein revealed, if it does not rule, cannot save you? You need not be blinded in so plain a case; if you love the

Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, if you love your souls, you will not; but remembering and considering how he has redeemed you from the curse of sin by the labours of his life, and the sufferings of his death, that he might present you to God, washed in his blood, and clothed with his perfect righteousness, you will answer his love, and fulfil the desire of his heart, by applying yourselves, with diligent endeavour and true prayer, to know his will that you may do it. You will pass through the world with this thought deeply engraved in your hearts, and these words always sounding in your ears—"The kingdom is the Lord's; and he is the Governor among the people." "For so," and not otherwise, as an inspired apostle witnesses, in opposition to all self-deceivings, "an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

SERMON XV.

For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. Rom. xv. 4.

HOPE is of something desired and wished for. And, in proportion to the opinion we have of the thing hoped for, we generally use all the methods in our power to secure it, and think ourselves happy or unhappy, are pleased or discontented with our state, as we are likely to succeed, or in danger of being disappointed. So we act, and so we are affected, with respect to the things of this world. According to the settled judgment we

make of their value and usefulness, and especially if we think them necessary to our happiness, we keep them constantly in view, bend our thoughts that way, pursue them eagerly, and put forth all our strength to attain them.

So we *should* be affected with respect to the concerns of our souls, of God, of Christ, of eternity. We should learn from Scripture to place our hopes on the immovable foundation of God's word and promises, in full belief that we shall not fail of our end, but have something to trust in that cannot deceive us, and will be the stay and comfort of our lives. This is our wisdom as men, and our profession as Christians. This is what the apostle here calls us to; and it is worth our while to inquire what it is. And if we find that it is suited to our wants, and will answer all our wishes, then, my friends, lift up your eyes and hearts to it, and put yourselves in a way of securing it. Hear what St. Paul says,—"Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." What is this hope? It is the hope of reconciliation with God, of living and dying in his favour; in a word, the hope of salvation by Jesus Christ. Happy are the men and women who make it their hope, rejoice in it, hold it fast as their only treasure, and would think themselves utterly undone if it was taken from them. Let me, therefore,

I. Tell you what we are without it;

II. What we are, and what our behaviour will be, when we really have it. And,

III. I shall exhort you to understand, receive, and embrace it.

Blessed God! it is a great thing I am speaking of;

thyself, thy Son, thy love to a lost world; the present comfort and everlasting happiness of us all. Oh! do thou speak where man cannot! Call powerfully to the dead soul, which has hitherto resisted thee in unbelief, that it may now at last listen to thy word, and pray with me for a blessing upon it: make it as a refreshing shower upon the hearts of all here present, that they may be fruitful in faith and love, in every good word and work, and grow up unto thee day by day in the hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

I. I am to observe to you what we are without the Christian hope.—With respect to our state and being in this world, God himself has written vanity and vexation of spirit upon all our hopes and expectations from it; and the Scripture tells us, once and again, that "man that is born of a woman, is of few days and full of trouble." So said Job, xiv. 1. So likewise said Jacob, Gen. xlvii. 9. "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been;" after enjoying as much prosperity, and as many signal blessings from the hand of God, as any we read of. He was not unthankful for the favours he had received, but what he said is left upon record for our instruction, and set up as a warning for all future travellers in the same road, that we might not build our hopes upon the sand, and that none might delude themselves with vain prospects of rest and happiness from a deceitful world. And does not the experience of every man living confirm what he said? Our best laid designs miscarry; our fairest hopes are blasted; and every thing about us and belonging to us, our bodies, substance, relations, all bring in this verdict against us, and declare, with one consent, that our rest is not here, and that the world will as certainly deceive us as it has done every son and daughter of Adam from the beginning.

Do you trust in your strength of body, and promise yourself a long life in the uninterrupted enjoyment of health? Do you think and say within yourselves, when your substance is increased, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry?" Tomorrow's sickness may convince you of your folly, and a few days more lay you and all your hopes in a coffin, and reduce your estate, whatever it is, to two yards of earth. Do you promise yourselves much comfort and satisfaction from your relations, husband, wife, or children? Alas! their life hangs by a thread as well as your own. Death takes them from you, with a stroke like that of tearing the heart out of the body, and they leave you under such a weight of sorrow as you hardly know how to bear: and as to your children in particular, whose prosperity you have so much at heart, it generally falls far short of your wishes and expectations. If they die, great is your trouble; if they live, they may vex you with their miscarriages, plague you with their ill tempers, and give you sad cause to mourn all your lives over their vices and follies. These things happen often, and are so much the common lot of mankind, that there is no founding a reasonable hope or expectation of happiness upon any thing in the world. We are almost sure to be crossed in every thing: either we do not gain it, or soon lose it; or if we are allowed to keep it, find but very little of that comfort and enjoyment from it we vainly promised ourselves.

Consider only this one thing: there never was that man upon earth who could truly say, concerning the world, that his heart was at rest, and he had what he wished for. That hour never comes to any of us, though we are always fondly looking for it, and flattering ourselves, one generation after another, that it will come. If it is the attainment of so much wealth, as once looked

great in our eyes, and we fancied would answer all our wishes, alas! the man is like one who has drunk salt water, and instead of being satisfied with what he has gotten, only finds his thirst increase for more: let it be what it will, we are convinced by sad experience, that it is not the thing we want. Whatever we have, we shall assuredly be stretching our thoughts beyond it, hope and long with restless desire for something else, and at last lie down in our graves disappointed. So truly does the Psalmist represent our condition, with a particular mark of observation set upon it (Selah), if we are so foolish as to centre all our hopes on this life,—"Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity."

But this is not all, or the worst of our condition, as natural men, without the Scripture hope. We are vain creatures in a miserable world because of *sin*, and as being under the curse of it. All the crosses we meet with, all the disorders in our bodies, all the sorrows we groan under, the death we dread and must inevitably undergo, are either the tokens of God's displeasure against us for sin, or sent and ordained to prevent it; insomuch, that if there was no guilt in the world, we might boldly affirm there would be no suffering of any kind. We know that from the beginning it was not so. We are told that when God saw every thing that he had made, he beheld it with delight, and pronounced it to be "very good." But now, surely, he does not delight in our misery, vexation, and disappointments of all kinds. He did not stamp his mark of approbation upon this. He made us good, and for good. He did not make death, nor, consequently, the pains and sicknesses which lead to it; but the first man, by sinning, brought it into the world; and what would never have been a natural necessity, if man had continued innocent, is now become the just sentence of condemnation upon all flesh. Well

might one say (Esdras), "O Adam, what hast thou done!" What a curse hast thou brought upon thyself, and upon the souls and bodies of us all, by disobeying thy Maker!

My brethren, let us not pass over one of the first things we read of in Scripture so carelessly in our minds, as I fear we generally do. The sin and punishment of the first man stand recorded in the word of God, as a most important lesson of instruction, and an everlasting warning to mankind of the infinite evil of sin, and God's hatred of it. And if we do not learn from this part of Scripture to judge of our present state and condition in the world under sin, and the mischiefs it will bring upon us, we shall learn nothing else from it. For did the first sin of the first man fall so heavy upon him, and was the threatening against it executed, notwithstanding that a world of unborn creatures were to suffer with him, and come under its penalty and curse? What then is sin in the judgment of God, all sin, every sin, yours and mine? Doubtless, if we consider the matter, we cannot avoid coming to this conclusion, that if God is the same, and sin the same now that they were from the beginning, every sin of every other man, every single sin we commit, how little soever it may seem in our eyes, makes us guilty before God, and will expose us to a like sentence of condemnation. What that sentence is, in its whole extent, I have not yet told you. The Scripture does—"The wicked shall be turned into hell; they shall go away into everlasting punishment." So that whatever we suffer on account of sin during our abode on earth, is nothing to what may come upon us hereafter. The bitterness of sin, the whole weight of its curse, is never felt in this life; and we are miserable beyond expression if we have no hope to relieve us in this case, nothing to set our minds

at ease from the amazing, dreadful fear of endless suffering in another world.

If you have gone along with me in what I have briefly set before you concerning the vanity of man's state in and from the world, and the wretched hopelessness of our condition more especially under sin, you will perceive that just here is the time and place for Scripture light to break in upon us, and to inquire whether God has not given some more firm ground of hope for us to rest our souls upon, and enable us to pass contentedly through the world, and resign ourselves quietly to him at the hour of death. For it is one great commendation of the Gospel hope, that it never forsakes us, when all others do; but accompanies us through life, lies down with us in our graves, and will take us out of them to set us at the right hand of God. I say, a hope of God's giving; for assuredly he alone can give it. The wisdom, the mercy, the love of it is all his; and that sin which has ruined our natures, cast us out of his favour, disturbs our peace, and baffles all our designs of happiness, can only be removed, in its guilt and power, by his grace and goodness.

Look, then, at the humble, happy birth at Bethlehem. Turn the eye of your souls to the Saviour of the world, taking our nature upon him that he might do great things in it and for it; and let your hearts, disappointed in every thing else, lead you to him, as the star did the wise men that came from the East. There is your comfort, and the remedy of all your troubles. "He will keep every soul in peace that is stayed on him," by giving us hope towards God against the fears of a guilty conscience, and making God our hope, instead of the false joys, vain allurements, and empty promises of a miserable world. This is both a glorious, blessed hope, and the only one

we can be sure of. With respect to the world, we know, by sad experience, that nothing is in our power, not the choice of our lot in it, not the continuance of any thing we have, not enjoyment from it, not an hour's breath. And the more we build upon any thing in the world, and the higher our expectations are raised of rest and satisfaction from it, the greater will be our grief and vexation in being disappointed. But Christ and his blessings are founded on the everlasting truth and promises of God, given us to trust in, and will be a never-failing spring of comfort to the soul that seeks after them. Peace with God, the redemption of our souls from the curse of sin, and eternal life, flow from them. What can settle our minds, and make us easy in every condition of life, if this does not? Make this your hope, and then the world itself will put on a new face to you; and though you will not be so foolish as to venture all your hopes upon it, and look for nothing better from the hands of God than it can afford you, yet you will be much more happy in it than you were before. Prosperity will be double, when it is sweetened to you with a sense of God's love; and adversity less painful, when you know that your best, great hope, and the very wish of your hearts, can never be taken from you; that every thing which befalls you in the course of providence is intended to secure it; and that death, so dreadful generally to those who live without this hope, will put you in full possession of it. But this leads me,

II. To show what our condition and whole behaviour will be when we have this hope. When we are in a state of hope, according to the Gospel, for the good things of Christ, our whole condition is altered, and the curse we are under as sinners abolished. Now, there are two things, more especially, which must be removed out of the

way; and till they are, our state may well be called unhappy and accursed — the *guilt*, and the *darkness* that is upon our souls. Let us observe how they are removed by the Scripture hope.

By reading and hearing the Scripture, and the great things therein told us, concerning the fall of man, our guilt, corruption, and death under it, the promise of redemption from it, and the accomplishment of that promise in Jesus Christ, we come to conceive hope of our own deliverance, and interest in the promised mercy; that we are restored to the favour of our offended God, shall live and not die, notwithstanding our original guilt, manifold actual transgressions, remaining corruption, and the death that is due to us. For all the promises of grace and mercy to sinners are made to faith; and hope is faith, and something more. It is faith growing and confirmed; faith lively, and in exercise; reaching after, and laying hold on the things believed, and believed so firmly as to be desired above all others, and made the ground of our choicest affections. And from hence you may discern the reason of your indifference, and dead coldness about heavenly things: it is because the faith you have, or pretend to have, does not go far enough, nor take such deep root, as to create any strong desire or real hope of them, nor, consequently, put you upon earnest, true endeavours to secure them to yourselves. It is the faith you were bred up in, receive without gainsaying or inquiry, conform to outwardly, and perform some acts of worship according to it, and that is all. The bent of your minds is the same, and your affections as earthly, and as much unchanged as if you had never heard of them. Whereas the faith which goes deep, by a work of the Spirit, and is seated in the heart, proves itself by its hope, which, I will venture to say, is the Spirit's surest witness, and one of the best proofs we can have of our faith. We

have as comfortable an evidence as can be desired that we are in the state of believers, and entitled to all the promises made to such, when we are so convinced of the worth and excellency of them, and have such an unshaken confidence in the word of God as to long after them, and be inwardly stirred up to attain them.

And as faith, growing up into a lively hope, is the removal of our *guilt*, and of the curse due unto us; so Christ in us, the hope of glory, is the true light of our souls, and chases away that *darkness* which keeps us blind to our true happiness all our lives. Now, if this is our recovery from a state of condemnation in sin to all the blessings of Christ, to the hope of God's favour and eternal life — what then are the generality of men doing in the world? If it please God, let it be no longer hidden from you; give way to the discovery of yourselves: hear me patiently. You will, perhaps, think it a heavy charge, and fret inwardly against the word, when you are told that all your care and diligence in your several employments, all your busy thoughtfulness about increasing your store, which, by a sad mistake of Scripture, you call improving your talent, or even about a livelihood, is the high road to hell, as well as downright wickedness, if you have no better hope, and live to no other end. My reason for saying this, I will tell you plainly; and it is grounded, among others, on this very text of St. Paul — "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." The meaning of which is, that there is no *other* hope, or foundation of comfort for sinners, but what the Scripture sets before us; and if we do not make it our hope, and build our comfort upon it, it matters not in what way we come short of it, or how we lose it, whether by neglect or open sin. For it is a most awakening Scripture truth;

necessary to be attended to, and thoroughly believed, that we are by nature the children of wrath, concluded in sin, and under a sentence of condemnation; which Christ himself confirms to us beyond all doubt, when he says, "he that believeth not is condemned already." Now, if we are so engaged in the cares and occupations of life, as quite to overlook and neglect our interest in the grace of God which bringeth salvation; if merchandise, and the farm, or daily labour, take up all our thoughts and time, so that we have none, even upon a sabbath, to bestow upon our souls; if the word is choked by over-caring for, or over-desiring, as well as over-enjoying the world; the saving benefits of it are lost to all intents and purposes; the one thing needful is not chosen; our state is unaltered; we are yet in our sins, and the wrath of God abideth on us. Let Christ here speak again for himself. Whatever it is that hinders any from accepting the Gospel invitation, whether the purchase of a piece of ground, or five yoke of oxen, or marrying a wife, or whatever else it is that the world throws in their way to keep them from Christ, he has pronounced of them, one and all, "I say unto you, that none of those men, which were bidden, shall taste of my supper." They wilfully slight his call, and refuse his offer; and, therefore, neither remission of sins, nor any other blessing of his kingdom, can belong to them. Nay, there is a still more piercing, severe word, which came from his mouth concerning the damnableness of such a spirit and temper—"Get thee behind me, Satan," said he to Peter, when he discovered the worldliness which was lurking in his heart, "for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Do not, I beseech you, turn a deaf ear to what I am now declaring to you, as the testimony and word of God concerning the life of your souls, or reject it in scorn with

thinking and saying, that if this doctrine was received, it would be a discouragement to all honest industry and prudent thoughtfulness about your worldly concerns. If it would, I am sure the Scripture will not bear me out in it. For it strictly binds diligence and labour upon all, and will suffer no man to think himself a believer, who is negligent of his proper business, an idle waster of his time, and does not provide for those of his own house. And the better Christians we are, the more carefully and conscientiously we shall do this. But here lies the point, and I pray God enable you to discern it: one man toils and drudges on from day to day, and from year to year; but never troubles himself about the Christian hope, never thinks in earnest of the state of his soul, what it cost to redeem it, or what diligence is required to save it; has his heart and affections chained down to the earth, and dies unbelieving and unawakened. He dies miserable and accursed; he launches into the gulf of eternity, a lost man. Another follows his business and labour in the world with suitable care and diligence; but at the same time knows the worth of his soul, finds leisure every day to think of it, thanks God for the hope of the Gospel, holds fast the promise of a better life, and would not lose it for the whole world. He is come into the light; he is translated out of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son; that thick cloud of worldly hopes and fears, and dependence on worldly comforts, which hangs as a curse over the minds and hearts of other men, is vanished from before his eyes. He can look up to God in all he does, and plead his promises in Christ for his support in all states and conditions of life. He may be crossed in the world, as all are, but never greatly disappointed; because, in the main, he expected nothing better from it. He knows he hath a treasure which cannot be taken from him; that he "ath found the pearl of great price, and

for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth it:" that is, he prizes nothing in an equal degree, freely quits all other expectations for it, and makes it his great care to preserve it. In particular, he desires to walk humbly with God — he is careful to avoid all sin, and be found in all duty — he uses prayer, and all other means of grace, to increase his faith, enliven his hope, and keep him steadfast unto the end.

1. *He desires to walk humbly with God.* He knows his desert from God is condemnation, and that we are all as brands snatched out of the fire. The Saviour, the will to receive him, the new heart to live unto him, the crown of glory — nothing of this is the work of our own hands, can never be a debt to us from God, but is all his undeserved mercy, and free grace in Christ Jesus. Though once, perhaps, he might think himself righteous, as all natural men vainly do, and in this confidence despise others, his present hope has taught him better things. He knows how he came by it. He has seen himself ruined in sin; an odious, despicable creature in the eyes of God, and is always vile in his own, not only for what he was, but what he is, as in his best estate coming far short of what is required of him, and in the account of divine justice always sinful. And when the pride of his heart is stirring him up to compare himself with other men, and upon that comparison to think more highly of himself than he ought, he checks himself with this thought, that the rule we must all be tried by, is not the lives and actions of our fellow sinners, but God's perfect law; and that when he "enters into judgment with us according to it, no man living can be justified." For this reason he desires to lie down in the dust, under a sense of God's pure eye and his own manifold transgressions. He believes the Scripture, "that all have sinned," as well as when it tells him "that all believers

shall be saved." And his own experience confirms the truth of Scripture to him in this point beyond all doubt. He now sees a world of sin in himself which before was hidden from him; and if he could think but for a moment that he has no sin, his conscience would rise up against him, his heart would condemn him. And, therefore, he does not expect to be saved as a saint, but as a sinner; taking the Lord Jesus Christ for his righteousness and whole salvation, and trusting only in mercy from first to last. But though he is not discouraged with the sight of himself, so as to fall into despair, or refuse the remedy of God's providing for him, and the comfort he offers him, yet his hope will not suffer him to be wicked and slothful, or at peace with his most deadly enemy; and, therefore,

2. *He desires to avoid all sin, and to be found in all duty.* Though he confesseth, with the utmost sincerity, and from a true knowledge of himself, that there is no health in him, with respect to God's most righteous and perfect law; yet he is convinced of his obligations to avoid whatever is contrary to it, and to fashion his heart and life by the rule of God's commandments. To live in known sin, would be the death of his hope.

And here I must warn you against a mistake which you may be apt to fall into, when you hear me speak of the humiliation of God's children, and unfeigned acknowledgments they make both to God and man of their utter worthlessness. I have told you before, they may well do it, considering the excellence and purity of God's law, which they are enabled to see in its whole spiritual extent, how much less they love him than they ought; how hard it is to govern all the motions of a deceitful heart, and bring every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ; all which they are taught of God to account to themselves for sin, and dare not stand upon

their innocence before him, though men like themselves can lay nothing to their charge. But nevertheless they wage continual war against sin, and do not live in the open breach of any of the commandments; not in lewdness, drunkenness, swearing, sabbath-breaking, or stealing, not lying for gain, not murdering with the tongue; if they did, they could not keep their hope, and durst not lift up their heads before God.

Do not, therefore, take advantage from what they say, and say truly, of their need of Christ's blood to wash them clean from all spot of sin every moment of their lives, to encourage yourselves in wickedness; supposing that as all are sinners, you may find mercy as well as they, though you still continue to harden yourselves against the fear of God; for you quite mistake the matter; they are not sinners in this sense; they know it would disprove their claim to an interest in Christ: and if at any time they are so unhappy as to fall into sin, they can have no ease in their minds till they rise again from it by repentance. They have seen the great evil and curse of all sin in the death of Christ, felt something of the bitterness of it in themselves, have come trembling before God for pardon in the blood of his Son; and dread above all things to take upon themselves the guilt of their former transgressions by returning to a state of open rebellion against him. They have entered into covenant with him to fight against all sin, outward and inward, and to persevere in all duty. Their ears are unstopped. They can hear the Psalmist saying, "Ye that love the Lord, see that ye hate the thing which is evil;" and Christ saying, "If ye love me, keep my commandments;" and this they resolve to do. Christ's death and sufferings, his coming into the world by an humble birth, and going out of it by a bloody death, show them that in sin, which they did not know before, a depth of evil

which they could never have thought of; and his love is a strong bond upon their souls to forsake it, and to abound in all goodness. Holiness is a very precious part of their hope in and from him, and what they cleave to him for as well as his forgiveness. But knowing their weakness, and the difficulties they have to struggle with,

3. *They use prayer, and all other means of grace, to increase their faith, enliven their hope, and keep them steadfast in it, and in all holy obedience unto their life's end.* They are men of prayer, as sure as they are possessed of Christian hope; not merely to please God with an act of outward homage, and to get rid of what they are taught to think a duty, but their state drives them to it. Their thoughts run much upon their hope; and their hearts as naturally form those thoughts into a prayer, as we do any thing else which we greatly desire. They are like children at the breast, who cry for their food, have but one appetite, and can be quieted with nothing else, do what you will to them. They understand the meaning of those words, which seem so hard and unreasonable to natural men, *pray always.* The bent of their minds is always to prayer; they pray in secret, pray with their families, and attend constantly upon public worship; and can no more be contented with a Sunday's religion only, or to take the nourishment of their souls only once a week, than they would to feed their bodies only one day in seven; neither do they expect a full blessing in the use of only one means of grace, when they know God has appointed more. Their hope is glorious, worth all their endeavours, and has taken fast hold of their hearts; and therefore they leave nothing undone, and especially no means of God's prescribing and commanding, to confirm them in it, and put them in a way of attaining it. They read the Scriptures, which bring the glad tidings of their hope to them from God, diligently, thankfully, devoutly,

and with prayer for a blessing. Sabbaths are welcome days to them, and well employed both at church and at home. A sermon which speaks of their hope sounds sweetly in their ears, and warms their hearts; and the blessed sacrament, which speaks it far more loudly than the tongue of man can do, which is the standing memorial of the Christian hope, and applies the blood of sprinkling to the conscience of the worthy receiver, is a feast indeed, and the delight of their souls.

III. I would now exhort you to understand and embrace this hope, as your portion from the Lord, what he sent his only begotten Son into the world to give us, and all Scripture was written to declare and confirm to us. The world is a known cheat, flatters us with false hopes, and deceives in all its promises: and if it answered all our wishes, if we never met with one cross in it, still what must relieve us from the curse of sin, give us hope toward God, prepare us for a happy death, and ensure to us the joys of eternity? I beseech you understand this: sin lies like a canker at the root of our happiness, and is the cause of all our troubles; but then the greatest crosses and sufferings of this life are no discharge from it, and if the curse of it is not removed before we die, we must lie groaning under it for ever. Now, what would you think of a man who was under a sentence of death, and might be delivered from it; but instead of using the means put into his power for that purpose, spent all his time and thoughts upon other things, was wholly bent on pleasing and enjoying himself, or amassing wealth in prison, and never awaked out of his vain dream till the day of execution? Verily, it is the case of too many of us, only with this sad difference, that if we die, we die eternally.

It is true, and blessed be God for it, we need not die.

You learn from Scripture, and are often hearing from this place, that there is hope: you know there is salvation from sin and all its cursed effects. But, alas! the sense of your condition, as fallen sons of Adam, and guilty of numberless transgressions in your own persons, is not weighty enough upon your minds, nor the evil and desert of sin so truly perceived, as to engage you to seek after the remedy of God's providing. I pray God give you this knowledge spiritually and effectually, that you may be in pain for yourselves, and cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And when you are thus awakened, and looking out carefully for deliverance, the Scripture is at hand with its help. It sets before you the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation with God; tells you how this redemption was purchased; offers life to your choice, and invites you, in the name of God and by all his mercies, to accept of it. Brethren, we must come to this point; we must have this hope, and without it cannot be Christians.

Observe what I say: if Christ is not our hope, our treasure, and the great wish of our souls, we can have no other proof to give of our *conversion*. The hope of his salvation is the very thing which brings us to him, if we know what we come to him for. And when we are grounded and settled in it, we are turned from darkness to light, renewed in the spirit of our minds, and have that great change wrought in us which will yield us true comfort, be our best guard against sin, keep the world out of our hearts, and preserve us in patient waiting upon God: but if we are not come to a true feeling and experience of this hope, so as to rest our souls upon it, nothing that we do in religion, or in the world, no clemency or kindness of behaviour, no strictness or sanctity of manners, no course of action, or practice of devotion, will afford us any evidence of the goodness of

our state; it can be nothing but an outward work and self-deceit. We are the same unconverted men and women, whatever we may think of ourselves, or however we may appear to the world, till Christ is all in all to us, and life by him the great hope and ruling desire of our hearts.

Let me advise and exhort you to bring your religion to this test, and to consider whether your minds are indeed possessed and governed by this blessed hope, "which God, who cannot lie, hath promised since the world began." For it is the hope of our high calling in Christ Jesus; the cordial of life, and the anchor of the soul; what he died to purchase for us; what all Scripture was written to teach us; what the ministers of the Gospel are ordained to publish, and the Holy Spirit is given to work in us. Happy is the man who can rejoice in it, and say continually in his heart, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead:" who, as a son of God and joint heir with Christ, can with an humble confidence look up to him in heaven, as having taken possession of it in our names, and gone thither to prepare a place for us: who, whenever he takes the Bible into his hands, can say, "Here is my estate, my treasure, enough for me to live and die with!"

Blessed God! is there such a hope as it tells us of, salvation and life for a world of ruined, undone creatures, dead in trespasses and sins? And is heaven again open for sinners, for me? Yes; here is the promise and assurance of it from the unchangeable God of truth, confirmed to me by his oath, and sealed to me in the blood of his Son. May I never be so foolish as to sell my Christian birthright for one morsel of meat; a lust,

a world! I am here told that, as a believer, "I am come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling." This is my faith; as a member of Christ, and a child of God, I am an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven; and to come to the full possession and everlasting enjoyment of it shall be my hope: and may He who hath given it to me, the God of all grace, enable me to hold it fast; to fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil, in the strength of it; and to say to every thing that would take it from me, as Naboth did to Ahab when he coveted his vineyard, "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."

Let us therefore, my brethren, give due attention to what the apostle here says of the great end for which the Scriptures were written, "It was for our learning; it was that we might have hope." And if the thing hoped for is exceeding great, and the attainment of it certain; if we have no other hope, and if it is the best we can have, since it includes Christ and all his blessings; we shall not think much to wait for it with patience, in patient faith, patient continuance in well-doing, and patient study of all Scripture, which brings us the glad tidings of the forgiveness of our sins, peace with God, and a right to eternal life by Jesus Christ. And as sure as we have this hope, we shall think it our best comfort in all states and conditions, our joy in prosperity, our support in trouble; nay, our great aim in the world will be to take care that we do not come short of it.

But as we could not so much as know either what this hope is, or how we are to be partakers of it without the Scripture, it appears at once to be a matter of the utmost necessity that we should read it diligently, value it as our greatest treasure, in comparison of it despise all other knowledge, and pray devoutly for the Spirit's help to

open it to us, and set it home upon our hearts. No vain excuses, no lazy, heathenish complaints of want of time, learning, capacity, or memory, can be allowed in a matter of such unspeakable consequence to the present peace and everlasting happiness of our souls. If the Scripture taught an infallible way of thriving and growing rich, or was your title-deed to an estate in this world, not one of you would be ignorant of its contents. There are at all times many persons who live by their labour, and yet can find time every day to read the Scripture, and make good their profession of having their portion in it. So would every one of you, if you loved it for the hope it sets before you. Consider what I say. You know it is the conveyance of an heavenly inheritance; and God, who knows it to be his best gift to mankind, and your guide to heaven, has therefore, in great mercy, put it into your hands, that you may rejoice in its light, and be enriched by it in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. He tells you that "all Scripture is given by divine inspiration, and able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus:" He commands you to search it, that you may come to the knowledge of the Saviour; and he has appointed an order of men to assist you in the understanding of it, to explain and enforce it, to keep you close to it, and beseech you in his name to open your hearts to the glorious, pleasing hope of being reconciled to him now, that you may enjoy him for ever. I know this to be my duty and office among you; and beseech God, for your sakes, to make me more and more sensible of it, that I may stir you up by all the ways I can think of to study and prize the word of God, and be your fellow-helper in the hope of the Gospel. To which purpose I shall conclude with an observation concerning the word *Scriptures*, and the sense in which it is here used in the text.

Now, it is evident, that by the word *Scriptures* in this place, we are chiefly, if not solely, to understand the Scriptures of the *Old Testament;* because but a very small part of the *New* was then written; and because it is here said, whatsoever things were written *aforetime*; meaning, as it should seem, a long time before the writing of this epistle to the Romans, and pointing for the hope here spoken of to the books of the Old Testament; the last of which, the prophecy of Malachi, was written some hundreds of years (four hundred, if not more) before the coming of our blessed Saviour. So that St. Paul hereby intended to affirm, that Christ, our hope, and the hope of all the ends of the earth, was declared and revealed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, as the Saviour of mankind from the curse of sin, death, and hell. And a very comfortable thing it is to every serious, patient reader of all Scripture, to observe the mercy of God to a lost world; that the great design of man's redemption was set on foot from the beginning, and runs through the whole Old Testament, as the marrow and kernel, the sum and substance of it, and the chief end for which it was written: that the promise of a Redeemer was given to Adam in Paradise, to be conveyed by him to his children as their birthright and best inheritance, and by them to their posterity; that it was renewed to Abraham, Moses, and David; preached to the Jews in their sacrifices and ceremonies, and more fully opened by the prophets, as the salvation both of Jew and Gentile. I say, this shows the great importance of the Old Testament, and points out to us what we should chiefly look for in it, and the excellent use we may make of it for the confirmation of our faith.

The improvement I would make of this observation is, to put you upon considering what great cause we have to bless God that our lot is fallen to us in the happier

times of full Gospel light; when "the day-spring from on high hath visited us," and we have the Scriptures both of the Old Testament and the New, to confirm our faith, and raise our hopes; the latter being to the former as noonday to the glimmering light of a taper. For "in these last days God hath spoken unto us by his Son;" and the hope of mankind, the Saviour of the world, which lay hid in the Old Testament, as it were in its seed, is now fully opened in the New, and presented to our view in its state of perfection. But to what purpose have we this advantage, if we do not read and study the blessed book put into our hands, to receive the comfort it brings us, to be enriched with its treasures, and made happy by its hope? What can it signify to us that the Sun of righteousness hath long since risen upon the world in the person and grace of Jesus Christ, and that his glorious light shines all around us, if it does not shine into our hearts, and scatter the darkness from our souls? the darkness of sin, the darkness of unbelief, the darkness of ignorance, the darkness of a worldly life?

The blessed apostle tells us in this chapter that all God's promises of grace and mercy to mankind were confirmed in Jesus Christ. And at the 13th verse he prayed for you and me, that "the God of hope,"—so called for the hope he hath given to sinners—O glorious title for us, who otherwise must have been without hope!—that "the God of hope would fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." Surely these promises are nothing to us, our belief is vain, and we read the Scriptures without effect, if we do not make this prayer our own; if God's peace, and the sense of our reconciliation to him, is not the joy of our lives; if we do not so "abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost," as to treasure it up in our hearts, despise every thing in

comparison of it, think ourselves only happy in it, and in the strength of it resist temptations, live above the world, and "keep our lamps burning like men that wait for their Lord."

Hear now what we are in and under our Christian hope, from the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel." The meaning is, that as the Jewish tribes, at certain stated times, came from all parts of the country to worship at Jerusalem, and offer sacrifices in the temple on Mount Sion; so all Christians, the true Israel of God, however dispersed through the whole world, are gathered together in one body under Christ their Head, to offer free-will offerings with a holy worship, the continual tribute of their grateful hearts, in the New Jerusalem, the city of the living God. And mark it well, this is their happy state and condition now, while they are upon earth. Though they may not see it themselves, it is so in truth and reality, and in the sight of God: for the whole family of God in heaven and earth is but *one* under its glorious Head; and his saints on earth actually belong to the blessed society of saints and angels in heaven, through the mediation and sprinkling of the blood of the holy Jesus, cleansing them from all sin, and which speaketh better things, and crieth louder in the ears of God for mercy, than the blood of Abel did for vengeance.

God grant that the cry of this precious blood, in all our hearts, may be above our sins and fears; and that,

"through patience and comfort of the Scriptures," we may hold fast the blessed hope of being numbered with the saints of God in glory everlasting. And many, many thanksgivings be to God from many ten thousands of rejoicing hearts, and happy, redeemed souls, for this glorious hope. O Lord, for thy dear Son's sake, give it into all our hearts in the power of the Holy Ghost, and make it a holy fire of love burning in us day and night; that we may sing with the whole multitude of the heavenly host, "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, good-will towards men." And all glory be to the ever-blessed Trinity, for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

SERMON XVI.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications. Zech. xii. 10.

In these words the prophet mentions that remarkable time when the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, or the Jewish nation, shall turn to the Lord in prayer, from a sense and conviction of their undone state, want of pardoning grace, and especially of their great sin in rejecting and crucifying Christ, and saying, as they do to this day, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

That the time will come for their conversion, and that the main body of the Jews will again be owned by God as his people, all the prophets declare with one consent, and many are of opinion that it cannot now be far off. But what is needful to observe to you is, that the cir-

umstance here particularly taken notice of as a mark of heir conversion, and owning of Christ for salvation, must lso be a mark and proof of ours; and that it is equally ecessary for every man and woman of every other nation, t all times to the end of the world, to have the spirit of race and of supplications poured upon them, i. e. a gra- ious spirit of prayer for the blessings of Christ and his lospel, from an earnest will and desire to be saved ccording to it.

This is what I am to open and press upon you at his time, and I pray God enable me to do it to your onviction.

I. I shall show what this spirit of grace and of sup- lications is, or when we may be said to have it.

II. That if we have it, it must be poured upon us, or ie Spirit's work in us.

III. That in the want of it, we can have no proof of a ork of grace upon our hearts.

I. I shall show what this spirit of grace and of sup- lications is. I have told you already in part, that it is a racious desire of the heart for spiritual good things, and or the health and prosperity of our souls; not for the iccess of our temporal affairs, or abundance of worldly lessings of any kind: for though we may lawfully ask or them, in token and acknowledgment of our dependence pon God, and are bound to be thankful for what he ives; yet we must be content in the want of them, and illing to resign them whenever he sees fit. These things iust not be uppermost in our thoughts, or the great urthen of our prayers. Alas! we have but too much f this disposition from nature; and such a state of mind s this, of continual caring and wishing for the world, is ur curse, and the depth of our fall; and what, if our

eyes were opened, we should pray against. That disposition of heart which is meant by a spirit of grace and of supplications, consists in choosing what God chooses for us; and having such a lively sense of the great value and importance of spiritual blessings upon our minds, and of the necessity of obtaining them, as to have our hearts continually turned to him in prayer for them; in considering the favour of God and eternal life as the great end we were born and live for, which we desire above all things, and without which we should think ourselves undone for ever.

When we not only acknowledge the being and providence of God in common with all mankind, but live in his presence, and choose him for our portion, and know that his favour and blessing is infinitely more to us than all the world: when we see our vileness, misery, weakness, and condemnation in sin; dread to continue in it; long to be discharged from the guilt, and delivered from the power of it: when Christ is presented to us by the eye of faith, as an all-sufficient Saviour, and the relief he offers us in the remission of our sins, strength against them for the future, and the gift of his perfect righteousness for our eternal justification, appears to us as the most welcome and seasonable of all mercies, every way suited to the case of sinners, and the very thing we want: when we acknowledge the necessity of the Holy Spirit's operation to convince us of sin, and work faith in us, and his indwelling in our hearts, to change the vicious bent of them, subdue our inbred corruption, natural enmity to God, and opposition to his will: when we are convinced that this world is not our home, or what we were made for; that the happiness of it is a dream, deceitful in its appearance, short in its continuance, and never attained to in such a degree as that we can say our hearts are at rest, and we have what we wish for; and

therefore sit loose to it; set our affections on things above, and turn our eyes and hearts to our everlasting inheritance in heaven:—I say, when we thus know God and ourselves; know our sin and danger; know our want of deliverance; know our great business in the world; we shall beseech him, as for our lives, to keep us steadfast in this belief, to remember us in mercy, and whatever else he denies us, not to deprive us of an interest in Christ; but to guide us by his Spirit, and make us his children, and heirs of his kingdom. Then we put up the true spirit of grace and of supplications; the natural, strong desire we all have for happiness is fixed upon its only right object, and forces the awakened soul to cry to the God and Father of mercies, "Give me thyself, give me thy Christ, give me thy Spirit, deliver me from the evil I feel or fear, and make me fit for thy heaven, or I die." The man, in whom this spirit is, continually cries, "What can I have a prayer for, if not for the life of my soul; peace and friendship with my heavenly Father; comfort and sweet hope here to bear me up in all conditions, and a blessed eternity? Is forgiveness of sins, and salvation by Christ, so light a matter with me that I cannot find in my heart to ask for it; or do I ask for it coldly, and with but little desire to have my request granted? Is there any thing else I could wish for more, than to be taken into God's protection as a child of his family; to have my guilt removed, my faith strengthened, and my will and affections renewed? Let others think most of the increase of their worldly store, and pray for it in the depth of their hearts, as God sees they do, though they do not think so, I have but one great prayer for myself and for them,—'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;' refresh us with thy peace, and guide us with thy counsel, that thou mayest receive us to thy glory."

Here is one praying, according to the apostle's advice, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, Eph. vi. 18; like a true beggar, from a sense of what he wants, and with earnest desire to obtain what he asks for. And God denies him nothing. He will give him the Holy Spirit and all spiritual blessings, much more certainly than an earthly parent would give bread to a hungry child that asks it of him; and all things shall work together for his good. His will to ask, is the earnest of his obtaining, and a security put into his hands for the performance of all God's promises. We can be as sure, as we are that God is true, that whatever we ask according to his will, he heareth us, and will grant all our petitions, 1 John, v. 14. Think what kind of life can be more happy and pleasant than this, to have that very end in view for ourselves which God has for us, and to know we shall not fail of it; to desire and long only for what we should, and to be infallibly assured that we shall have it. But then know of a truth, that if we have this great end in view, the salvation of our souls according to Christ and his Gospel, and if the desire of our hearts is after it, in a state of prayer and earnest supplication,

II. It must be the Spirit's work in us.—The Spirit of God works in us a knowledge and conviction of our lost estate and want of Christ; and then prayer follows upon it, and is preserved in vigour and exercise by his continual abode with us. As we believe, so we pray; and if there is no prizing of Christ, nor desire of his benefits, we never pray according to the will of God. And, therefore, to make way for the Spirit of prayer in us, our sin must be laid open to us, especially the great sin of not seeking after, cleaving to, and loving God; our wills must be turned to him for pardon and deliverance from it, Christ must be precious to us, and our hearts set upon

the joys and glories of another life. But now what hard work is here for man, naturally turned from God, denying his sin, and as full of pride as corruption, bowed down to the earth, fond of his present state, and for the most part wishing only for such poor comforts as it can afford him! Here then the Spirit begins with us, and lays the foundation of prayer in the sense of our guilt, misery, danger, and inability to help ourselves; in turning our hearts against the evil that is in us, and stirring us up to seek after those good things, which God freely offers, and is ready to give us. And it is for want of this sense and feeling, for want of knowing what we are and what we should be, and how little we can do for ourselves, that so many never come to that first prayer of an awakened man — "Lord, I am ignorant and unbelieving; a poor, sinful, weak creature; and must be undone without help; Lord, have mercy upon me."

Let not this discourage you, my brethren, nor keep you from ever attempting to break through the difficulties which lie in your way, because of yourselves you have neither understanding to discern, nor the will to desire what God has made known to you for your everlasting benefit. Say not, as the children of Israel did when they came to the borders of the promised land, and should immediately have taken possession of it — "We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless, the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled and very great; and moreover, we saw the children of Anak there — men of gigantic strength and stature, difficulties upon difficulties, never to be surmounted," Num. xiii. 27, 28. And so they all, except two faithful, undaunted men, perished in the wilderness.

Say not thou, therefore, "Returning to the love and fear of God, and salvation by Jesus Christ, is a desirable

thing, but hard to be attained; we are slow to apprehend it, and have no wills to embrace it; flesh and blood has got possession of us, and we know not how to break loose from it, or turn our thoughts from earth to heaven, from the world to God." But consider with thyself that this is a great salvation, the greatest benefit that God can bestow upon thee, and *must* be attained, let the difficulties in the way to it be what they will; either this, or damnation. Consider, that what is impossible with men, is both possible and easy with God; that it is he who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, i. e. his goodness inclines him to work all in us, and he takes pleasure in doing it, and can both turn thy heart to the salvation thou wantest, and thy whole heart into a prayer for it. And if this is not done, it is because we refuse his mercy, and resolve to run all hazards rather than submit to a change of our state. But whenever we give way to the Spirit's work, and find ourselves undone without help, and that there is no help any where for us but in the love and power of God, we shall as naturally turn to him for it, as we look to him for rain and fruitful seasons; and be ten times more earnest with him for a blessing upon our souls, than ever we were, in the depth of our hearts, for any kind of outward prosperity, and think prayer an easy condition of obtaining it. We shall then look on him whom our sins have pierced, as it is here said the Jews will do, at the same time that the spirit of grace and supplications is poured upon them.

When the veil is taken from our hearts, and we have a clear sight of sin, and of Christ crucified for it, and of the great goodness of God in giving him to die for us, we shall be very loth to go without our share of it, and strive hard for a blessing as Jacob did; and it will then be with us all as it was with St. Paul, when God struck

him to the earth with a light from heaven—"Behold, he prayeth!" Doubtless he was no stranger to the act of prayer, and had been many times, if not daily, upon his knees. But all the while he prayed in darkness; whereas now his soul was at stake; he was a convinced man; pardon of his sin, and the knowledge of Christ, must be had; and for these he now prayed so earnestly and fervently, and with such a different sense of things upon his mind, as that it might be said he had never prayed before.

And as the Holy Spirit thus brings us to a state of true earnest prayer, by convincing every one of us of our want of help, and of the greatness of Christ's salvation, and stirring us up to call on the name of the Lord for it, so he maintains and keeps it up in us by his continual presence; not only giving us the grace of devotion, but directing us in it, and helping our infirmities; because, as the apostle says, Rom. viii. 26. "we know not," in many cases, "what we should pray for as we ought;" and without the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, and supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we should be as backward to this work, and unable to perform it aright, as any other part of our religion. So necessary is it that the spirit of grace and of supplications should be poured upon us; or grace to see the greatness of Christ's salvation, and our want of it, and a spirit and will to pray heartily for it. Which brings me to show,

III. That in the want of this spirit, we can have no proof of a work of grace upon our hearts. A hearty desire to pray, implies knowledge and belief, and is grace begun, stirring, and working in us; a sign that we understand our wants, and prize and seek after the good things of Christ, and all spiritual blessings. Prayer is the very breath by which a regenerate man lives; the pulse of his

heart beats strong with it; and it conveys health and nourishment to his soul. On the other hand, where there is no relish for prayer, or actual exercise of it, all is darkness and unbelief, sin is unfelt and unfeared, Christ slighted, his peace undesired, and we live without God in the world. And take notice, that what I say is not meant of what is called the gift of praying by the Spirit, or a ready conception and free utterance in prayer, as if I thought this a necessary proof, or any certain proof at all, of a work of grace; neither do I undervalue it in those who have it. But the bent of the heart, choice of Christ, and preference of him to all the world — the inward true desire of the mind and will to partake of his benefits, and be filled with his graces — this is prayer, continual prayer in the sight of God; is heard of him, though a word be not spoken; but, nevertheless, will break out and show itself in the outward exercise, in a daily waiting upon him in private, and a diligent observance of the times and seasons of public worship.

There may be, and doubtless are, different degrees of this spirit in different persons, according to the different measures of their faith; neither is the disposition and will to pray always at the same height in any. Alas! the best have but too much occasion to complain of their being cold and unaffected in their addresses to God; and it is their grief and trouble when they are so. But what they *do* ask in the first place, whenever they pray, and would always ask with the greatest earnestness of desire, is to know Christ, to be established in the faith, to love God, and improve in all manner of holiness, according to his Gospel. And this is required of all, as a necessary proof of a work of grace in their hearts. It is not coming to church on Sabbath-days, or oftener, or observing a daily method of devotion, which will afford us any proof in the case. We may do this because we have been taught

it; or to quiet conscience, as thinking that God requires it of us as a duty, and is pleased with the bare act of an outward worship. But what is thy heart asking in prayer? What is thy great purpose in it? If it is not for the very thing which God requires thee to ask of him, and wants to give thee, and without which, every thing else he can give would be no better than a curse to thee; if it is not for thy recovery by Christ out of that depth of sin and misery thou art fallen into; for a right understanding of the will of God, free choice of it, and strength to do it; how often soever thou prayest, whatever thou sayest to him in words, still the spirit of grace and of supplications is not poured upon thee; thou hast not the knowledge, faith, and heart of a Christian!

And if this may be said of those who are not altogether prayerless as to the outward form, what must we think of others who have neither spirit nor form, who seldom or never pray in private, and will not set up the worship of God in their families? Why, verily, that if they believe there is a God, they have no reverence for him in their hearts, and do, in effect, say to him, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." They have not that fear of God which the Scripture tells us is the wisdom of man; and in every house where he is not worshipped, you may write upon the door—The plague is within—the plague of unbelief, the plague of an evil heart, the plague of spiritual blindness; master and mistress sick of a deadly distemper, under the wrath and curse of Almighty God, and yet without knowledge and feeling of it, or the least desire to have it removed.

But still I must put you in mind what it is that I am chiefly aiming at in this discourse; which is to instruct you in the nature and right spirit of prayer, that so you may know what your religious state is, and how you stand affected towards God and heavenly things. And

my design, if it pleases God, is to work conviction in you by this instance, and help you to bring the matter of your salvation to a speedy issue with yourselves; prayer for Christ, for faith in him, or the continuance and increase of it, and acceptance through him to a new state of holiness here, and eternal happiness hereafter, or else all we do in religion is nothing but mistake and dead formality; this is what I would gladly convince you of. Is God's offer of grace, mercy, and peace, by Jesus Christ, our only relief, his whole nature of love manifested to us, the grand blessing he has to bestow upon us, our great hope in life and death; and are we so indifferent and unconcerned about it, as not to make it the great wish of our souls, and the ground of all our prayers to him? Oh! let us at last be sincere with God, and faithful to ourselves; let this from henceforth be the language of our hearts: "If this is praying, we are utter strangers to it. We are not importunate with God in secret for the saving knowledge of Christ, and an assured interest in him. We do not ask of him the light of his Holy Spirit, to teach our hearts to have a right judgment in all things, and joy in his holy comforts. Our comforts are of another kind; and we had rather make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, and live at ease in the world. If we might have our choice of grace or riches, and durst say it to God in plain words, we should ask the latter."

Alas! my brethren, what a heart is here, if I have truly exposed it to your view! What blindness and self-deceit do you live in! How dangerous is your condition! You are this day a downright unbeliever; the Lord pluck you as a brand out of the fire! Take not one step farther in the road you are in, for it leads to hell and destruction. If it pleases God to dart one ray of heavenly light into your dark, benighted soul, come to him with a true confession, and get this prayer into your heart;

"Lord, I am in great doubt of my state. I always knew my faith must save me: but unless a foolish trust in thy mercy against thy own word is faith, I see plainly I have none. When I presented myself before thee in the form of a supplicant, it was not with a design to draw nigh to thee; I kept myself as much from thee then as at other times; and I could not ask of thee what thou wantest to give. Without a lie in my mouth, I could not say, Give me a heart to love thee, and devote itself to thy service; make me a new spiritual man in Christ, passing through the world as a stranger and pilgrim, with my eye steadily fixed upon my heavenly country; for thou, who knowest all things, knowest I did not desire it. Lord, look upon me in mercy. Scatter the thick mists of ignorance and error which hang over me. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; help my unbelief; Lord, teach me to pray." Blessed be God, he *has* taught us in few words, but all life and spirit, and full of divine sense and meaning. You know I mean the Lord's prayer, with a brief explanation of which I shall conclude, and cannot have a better wish for you and myself, than that it may be the very prayer of our hearts.

"And it came to pass, that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, "say"—with understanding, and full persuasion of the goodness of what you pray for, and truth of desire to obtain it—"Our Father"—our common Father, and Lord of our hearts in Jesus Christ,—"which art in heaven,"—through thy love our home and inheritance, and the great wish of our souls—"hallowed be thy name"—be thou reverenced, adored, and praised by us, according to thy majesty, and great in our esteem, as thou art in thyself—"thy kingdom come"—let thy kingdom of

righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, come in our souls, and in all the world: that so — "thy will may be done in earth as it is in heaven" — by a cheerful submission of every creature to all thy commands, and a devout resignation to all thy providences;— "give us this day our daily bread,"—what thou seest to be needful for the support of our bodies, contentment with, and thankfulness for, such things as we have, and grace to cast all our care upon thee; and, especially, give us day by day, and every moment of our being, the bread which cometh down from heaven, and nourisheth to everlasting life,— "and forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" — those trespasses of ours, which are debts to thee, and must be paid to thy sovereign justice, and could only be discharged by the blood of Christ; and, oh! let this great love of thine incline us to forgive all others, and let us not presume to ask forgiveness of thee with any other disposition but to pardon their debts when they cannot pay, and their trespasses against us always — "and lead us not into temptation" — leave us not to ourselves, for then we must fall by every temptation; assist and strengthen us in all the dangers of our souls; and whatever trials thou sufferest to come upon us, carry us safely through them, and enable us to improve them to our purification — "but deliver us from evil" — from the power and malice of the devil, and from the evil of our own hearts — "for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever" — we acknowledge thee to be the great *King* of heaven and earth; and fly to thy *power* for succour in all the wants of our souls and bodies; and whatever we are, do, or receive, ascribe the whole *glory* of it to thee. Amen. So be it.

Holy Jesus! what a blessed prayer is this! God grant we may all say it in spirit and truth! Lord, teach

us to pray from a true ground, the desire of pardon, sanctification, and fitness for heaven. Pour upon us the spirit of grace and of supplications, make this employment the joy and comfort of our lives, and accept us in it, through Jesus Christ our Lord and only Saviour.

SERMON XVII.

And it repented the Lord that he made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. Gen. vi. 6.

UPON hearing these words, you will be ready to ask, How can it be said that God, who is unchangeably blessed and happy in himself, can repent and be grieved, and so grieved as to be cut, as it were, to the heart? The answer to which is, that he is here represented as speaking after the manner of men, who know very well what it is to repent when they have brought ruin upon themselves, and to be grieved for the loss of what is most dear to them. And the expressions are used to convey to us a lively notion of the miserable condition into which mankind was fallen, and to make a strong impression of it upon our minds. You should therefore, upon hearing the words, be ready to ask yourselves another question, what that condition was? And when you know it, to proceed still farther, and inquire, whether it is the condition of mankind now, how we came into it, and whether there are any means of deliverance from it? To assist you in these inquiries according to the light of Scripture, will be the business of this discourse. The Lord help me in it; and as they are of the greatest importance to your repentance and conversion, present

comfort, and everlasting salvation, I beseech you attend carefully, and while I am speaking lift up your hearts to God in prayer, to enlighten your understandings, and incline you to receive and apply what is said to the state of your souls.

I. I am to consider what the condition of mankind was, at the time here spoken of.

II. Whether mankind are in it now.

III. How we came into it.

IV. The way and means of deliverance from it.

I. What was the state of mankind here spoken of, on account of which it is said, "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart?" It was the condition of mankind in sin. Sin, that enemy to God and man, had taken possession of them, and so thoroughly infected their natures, that, according to the foregoing verse, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." What crimes they were guilty of, or what *particular* sins they were, if any, which drew this severe censure of them from the mouth of God, we are not told; only it is said in general, that "the earth was filled with violence." From whence we may conclude, that God was forgotten and neglected by them, and the fear of him banished from their hearts. They did what they listed, and lived only to gratify their natural and sensual appetites, without restraint from his commands, or regard to his authority, or sense of what they were made and sent into the world for; which was to walk with him, as Enoch and Noah did, in the fulness of a free obedience, or as one friend does with another, delighting and delighted; to make him the great object of their faith,

hope, love, and rejoicing, and to qualify themselves for the eternal enjoyment of him by a life of godliness, brotherly kindness, temperance, justice, and holy fear. But instead of this, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," ruled and employed all their thoughts, were the end they lived for, and the only laws by which they would be governed; as we may learn from the character which our Saviour gives of them, "they did eat, they drank, they married wives, and were given in marriage." Why, you will say, are not these things lawful and innocent, and necessary? How can the business of the world be carried on, or the world continue without them, or without "buying and selling, planting and building," as they did in the days of Lot? All this is acknowledged; and yet here is weighty instruction for you, respecting man's duty and great business in the world, if you will receive it on the authority of Scripture; whose excellence it is to rectify our mistakes, to enlighten our dark minds with the wisdom which cometh from above, and guide us into the way of truth and happiness. For these are the men of whom it is said in the same place, Luke xvii. "The flood came, and it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all." Not for eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, building and planting; no, but (mark it well) for neglecting their souls, living altogether to this world, and despising the offer of a better. They did not like to retain God in their knowledge, or put themselves in the way to a happiness of his choosing for them, by living in subjection to his will, and recovering themselves out of that state of darkness, disorder, and corruption into which they were fallen; but were bent upon pleasing themselves in opposition to him, and if they could not find their heaven in the enjoyments and pleasures of this life, would not be

persuaded to look for it any where else. And the consequence was such as might be expected, "the earth was filled with violence, and the wickedness of man in it was great;" as it always will be where men do not make the fear and love of God, faith in his promises, regard to his favour, and choice of him for their portion, the ruling principles of their lives. They are then prepared for the worst of crimes, and will be carried headlong into all manner of injustice, violence, and wickedness, at the will of their lusts. It is not to be supposed that all the men of that generation were equally licentious, and all ran into the same excess of riot. Doubtless there was a difference then, as there is at all times, in the behaviour and characters of men; some better and some worse, some from natural prudence and goodness of temper more civil, peaceable, and orderly than others. But nevertheless it is said of them all without distinction, "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart, and the flood came and took them all away." Whereas if God had known that any of them were worthy to escape the general destruction, we may presume he would have provided room for them in the ark, as he did for Noah and his family. What is it then that Christ affirms of them, as the reason why they were left to perish? It is, that "they did eat and drink, married and were given in marriage;" hereby giving us to understand that their hearts were wholly set upon the world, some in a more gross way of open violence and shameless riot, but all forgetful of God, negligent and faithless concerning a life to come. And here is the instruction I told you of. Our great business in the world is with God; to look up to him in all we do, to receive him into our hearts, to adore and love him, to depend upon him for the blessings of time and eternity, to make him our hope and our portion, to seek after him as

our treasure, to live with him and to him here, and to qualify ourselves for the completion of all his promises, in the everlasting enjoyment of him. But if we do not make this the great end and aim of our lives, keeping our thoughts intent upon it, and our hearts close to it, as the one thing needful, we are not the creatures he designed us to be, we do not answer the end he made us for, we are not capable of the happiness he intends for us, and can only bring us to in the way of our own desires and affections. If God is not our choice, and the supreme delight of our souls, whatever else we do, we live only to displease him, whatever else we are in pursuit of will end in disappointment and misery, whatever else we get, we lose all. It matters not as to our final, eternal interest, how prudent we are for this world, or how decently and regularly we enjoy it, if we do nothing else, and say with the fool in the Gospel, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," and look no farther. According to the wisdom of the world this man was no fool; he knew when he had enough, and resolved to sit down contented, and make the best of what he had gotten; but he had other work upon his hands which he never thought of, and God knew what to call him. For "so," saith our Lord, "is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God," Luke, xii. 21. If we have God for our treasure, we are rich indeed; if any thing, or every thing else, we are poor beyond expression. We may pass through the world with more ease and satisfaction to ourselves in a course of diligence, sobriety, and quiet behaviour, than the contrary; and he is a fool indeed who destroys his health by intemperance, or wastes his substance by idleness and extravagance, or provokes the ill-will of his neighbours by churlishness, or malice; but if we are only carrying on a design for this world, though

it be with never so fair a reputation, we are no better than others in point of acceptance with God. He says, "Seek ye after God, and your soul shall live;" and he cannot be mistaken in what he advises and directs us to as the way of life. What then can be the meaning of this, but that if we are turned from him, if we do not seek after him, esteem and choose him as our portion and the dearest treasure of our hearts, as our God to help, rule, and bless us, and take us to himself when we die, our souls do not, cannot live, we are in the way of eternal death. He will not, according to his promise, "any more cut off all flesh with the waters of a flood;" but if he sees the same men and the same hearts upon the earth as he did then, he is still the same God, and the words of the text are alike spoken of all such, "It repenteth the Lord that he made them, and it grieveth him at his heart."

II. The next thing we are to consider, is, whether this is now the condition of mankind.

And my design under this head is to observe to you that naturally it is. The Scripture tells us of it, and the history of the world in all ages confirms it. We cannot think of any time when it was, we cannot say it is now, the natural disposition of men to honour and fear God, to make it their chief study to please him, and prefer his favour to all earthly possessions and enjoyments. We cannot say with regard to men, that we act invariably by the sacred rules of justice and charity, giving to all their dues, loving their persons, supplying their wants, studying the general peace, never doing to others what we should think hard and unreasonable in our own case, and so inclined to good as always to give it the preference to what we know to be evil. Who that sees what strange perverseness, what a stubborn spirit of disobedience and opposition to the will of God rules in mankind, would think we

had such a book as the Bible among us, or the law of the Ten Commandments, with these words at the head of them, "I am the Lord thy God!" How early does pride and self-will, impatience of restraint, contempt of parents, and contradiction to their commands, appear in the child! And what is the man but a slave to his passions, governed by his interest, devoted to the world, and resolved to have his fill of it, without any serious regard to, or desire of a better? What is the earth, at this day, but a theatre of war and contention, nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, to the distress, impoverishment, ruin, and deaths of many thousands in all parts of the world? And the sufferers themselves, however pitied they may be, what are they but retaliated in kind, seeing they have the same bloodthirsty disposition, as eagerly engage in war, just or unjust, concur as heartily in carrying it on, as their enemies, and would inflict the same sufferings upon others which fall to their lot? Domestic peace, and family union, where the obligations to it are more peculiarly sacred, and the ties of nature strong, how frequently is it broken for mere trifles, and when once broken hardly ever to be restored! Trade, how is it promoted and extended, from east to west, but by violence, usurpation, and bloodshed? What frauds are practised in buying and selling, what barefaced, shameless contempt of law and conscience prevails almost universally in robbing the customs! Resentment, envy, malice, revenge, the clashing of interests, and the universal slander of evil tongues, what disturbance do they create in neighbourhoods, what unhappiness do they bring upon mankind, and how surely do they destroy every man's own peace and self-enjoyment! So that we need not go far from home, nor look any where but in our own times, to know what the wickedness of the old world was; the same nature lives, the same corruption reigns in us, and where the strength of

it is not subdued by divine grace, will always be productive of the same effects. All the wisdom of it is from beneath, and what that is St. James tells us, "earthly, sensual, devilish." We say, when we meet in this place, that we believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; professing by these words, that as our God, Father, and Maker, he has a sovereign right to govern and dispose of us, and is entitled to our love, willing subjection, and faithful obedience. But there is little of this belief appearing in our practice, or written in our minds. I might ask you, one by one, whether you make it your business to study the commands of God, or ever came to this determination with yourselves that you would receive and be governed by them, all and every one of them, because they are his commands. If it is but the bare request of a friend or parent, it is respected and remembered, whilst the commands of our Maker are slighted; and as to an inward reverence, esteem, and love of him, we find by experience that it is far from being the true bent of our minds. I do not mean that we always disobey him, and go contrary to his commands in every thing, for our own interest and convenience in many cases will not suffer us to do it; but how few are there, even with the rule of Scripture in their hands, who govern themselves by a steady regard to his will, live in his presence, trust in his promises, give him the chief place in their affections, and take him for the God of their hearts! Not doing this is our corruption and sin, and the cause of all the injustice, disorder, and violence that is in the world; and though we are not amongst the foremost in wickedness, but even behave ourselves so as to gain the respect and esteem of men, yet if we have not an eye to God, and are not seeking his blessing and favour in all we do, we are corrupt in the deep ground of our hearts, and, so long as we continue thus alienated

from him, abominable in his sight. I fear you do not understand me; but, perhaps, you may when I have said a few words more. The text says, "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." This was a sad reproach to the men of that age, and the forerunner of a heavy sentence. But then it does not only belong to them of whom it was particularly spoken, but to all other men and women, at all times, in all places, who are in the same condition; to us, if it is ours. And that we are naturally in the same condition, I am endeavouring to convince you, by showing not only that evil abounds in the earth in all ages, among us at this day, as it did before the flood; but chiefly and especially from this consideration, that though we may not be chargeable with gross wickedness, nor vicious in our outward practice, yet we still mind earthly things, and set our affections upon them, to the neglect of God, and our interest in him. You see no great harm in this, no cause of repentance, no necessity of looking out for change of your state; but, nevertheless, you see it is the very thing which Christ points us to, as the sin of those who lived before the flood; and it is certainly our sin as much as it is theirs, if the world has the same possession of our hearts. God knows what he made us for, and what we should be. He made us for himself, and for a life of godliness, in the knowledge and love of him; but if we are not so persuaded and so disposed, whatever else we are, or whatever it is that keeps us from him, he knows that "the imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil continually," and our works so far from being pleasant and acceptable to him, that, however we may struggle against the truth, they have the nature of sin. But you will say, is there no difference? Is not one who lives orderly and reputably in a better condition than those who live in open sin? Is not he who has regard to

the law of chastity better than a fornicator, or adulterer? Is not a sober man better than a drunkard, or an honest man, who has regard to his word, better than a cheat, or a liar? Yes, doubtless, both in the sight of God and man; and with regard to this world he will find his account in it; but if the main thing is still wanting, a heart for God, instead of the world, the flesh, and the creature, he is in no better a condition with respect to his eternal salvation. The decent, sober part of mankind call this hard judging; not taking the Scripture for their rule, nor considering that the law of God consists of two parts, our duty to God and man, and that if we are never so exact in the latter, if we are temperate in meat and drink, righteous in our dealings with men, and observe the law of kindness in our actions, still there is another sacred part of the law; we must be godly too, by cleaving to God in our hearts, wills, and desires, or else we are continual breakers of the first and great commandment, and liable to condemnation. Consider now what you are doing, and what foundation you can be upon for life, when you are without God in the world, unawakened, unconverted, and still in that fallen condition in which St. Paul tells us all mankind are lying till they repent, and turn from the error of their way. He says, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God;" Rom. iii. 11. Alas! we must own it to be the truth. We have other thoughts in our heads, and other designs in the world, than living to God, and securing our portion in him. We must confess that, till a great change has been wrought in us, fearing, trusting, loving, and worshipping him in spirit and in truth, is not the prevailing habit and ruling temper of our souls. You will not be at a loss to know what I mean, if you call to mind how backward you are to prayer, how sadly you neglect the Scriptures, how little you improve and delight in your

sabbaths, how seldom you sit down to think of God and your souls, how little comfort you find in the hope of living with him for ever; nay, what despisers you are of religion and godliness, wherever you see a better form of it than your own. Not that it is usual for men to stop here, or to have nothing in their hearts and lives displeasing to God besides neglect of duty to him. For it is by the fear of the Lord that men depart from evil; and, without a religious regard to him, they have nothing to restrain them from it but their own interest and convenience; which is keeping the law in their own hands, and will set them at liberty to sin as much as they please. From hence it comes to pass that wickedness abounds in the world, and that even the better part of it do not govern themselves in all respects by the law of conscience. For let them pretend what they please, if they do not set God always before them, and make it the settled aim of their lives to come to the everlasting enjoyment of him; they will be found sadly wanting in their duty so far as it relates to man. But put the case at the best, if they are strict, moral men, and unblamable in the eye of the world, yet why must God be the only being who has not his due from them? Why does such horrid depravity escape your notice? If he says to every son and daughter of Adam, "Give me thy heart," why do we withhold it from him, and how can he bless us and be our God, while we do? Oh! let us see and be well aware of this foul stain and great blemish of our nature, this mother sin, and the root of all sin. Let us confess the wretchedness of our condition, and the greatness of our guilt, in withdrawing ourselves from the God that made us, choosing the world instead of him, and living all our days without him. Let us bring our state to this test, if we would have comfort of it, or hope towards God. Our outward behaviour is the only proof we can give to others of the soundness of our religion; but it is no proof in the case to

ourselves, without an inward consciousness that the bent of our wills, and the strength of our desires, is to God and heavenly things. For here lies the point of conversion; it is returning to the duty and allegiance we owe to God, to a state of friendship and communion with him, to the love and esteem of him, with desire to be made partakers of his holiness, and enriched by him with all spiritual blessings. And if it could be supposed that we had no other sin but the want of this disposition toward God, it is full proof of our corruption, and, if it is not acknowledged and repented of, will give us up to the misery of eternal separation from him. This is what all who are truly awakened by the Spirit do acknowledge and repent of. They see plainly what a lamentable condition of alienation from God they are fallen into; that they have not honoured him according to the greatness of his name, nor been thankful for his benefits, nor trusted all their concerns in his hands, nor lived in his fear, nor governed themselves by his law, nor had a single eye to his work; that when they worshipped him, it was only with their lips; they did not know what they were doing; it was not a drawing nigh to him with their hearts; and when they prayed to him to cleanse the thoughts of their hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, that they might perfectly love him, turn from the world, forsake all sin, and become new creatures, they would have been sorry that he should have taken them at their word; that the knowledge of God has not been their study, and that as to any delight in him, desire to be like him, and hope of being happy in him, they have been utter strangers to it. And this knowledge of themselves, now opened to their minds, fills them with shame and concern. If they could justify themselves before men, in respect of their behaviour in the world, as they never can when Christ, the great Searcher, comes to sit in judgment upon them, yet this can give no ease in the case; their forgetfulness,

neglect, and contempt of God, and shutting him out of their hearts, as it is a sin of a deep dye in itself, so it is now with them, and laid upon them as their burden; and till the guilt of it is removed from them by some means or other, they know there is no flying from those dreadful words, "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Is this your state, and do you see no evil in it, nor fear none? Has the God who made you no right in you, nor love from you? Is he an unknown God to you, as to the turning of your wills to him, or any experience you have of his blessing, grace, and work of power upon your souls? And yet if you have not taken him for the God of your hearts, this is your state as sure as you were born; and if you do not know, and repent of it, and betake yourselves to your remedy, you will die blind, sinful, and unconverted. If you are not a notorious, open sinner, but a civil, humane man, rational and sober, you are just what many of the heathens were before the preaching of the Gospel, and many are in all places where the sound of it never came, but not yet a disciple of the faith, "renewed in the spirit of your mind, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Eph. iv. 23. Jude, 21.

III. The third thing proposed was to show how we came into the state of apostasy from God which we are in by nature.

Man was made in the image of God, upright and innocent, with all such perfections of body and mind as God pronounced to be very good, and with full power to preserve himself in the happy state in which he was created, by an unsinning obedience; to the end that when he had fulfilled his days in a paradise upon earth, he might be translated to a higher paradise, or a state of

everlasting glory in heaven. But by transgressing the law which had been given him, in one forbidden act, he forfeited all right and title to the promise of life. The covenant which God made with him was broken on his part, his claim of obedience was gone for ever; and so "sin entered into the world, and death by sin," Rom. v. 12,—death spiritual and temporal, and, without the mercy of God, death eternal. The death of his soul to the life and likeness of God, or its fall from God into a state purely natural, which was the worst part of his sentence, took place immediately in the very day and hour of his disobedience, as God had forewarned him; and we, as his children, come into the world in the same condition of corruption and weakness which he found himself to be in after his fall, and, as David confesseth for himself and all mankind, "are conceived and born in sin," Psalm li. 5. Sin has taken possession of our nature, and our subjection to it is what an apostle calls "the law in our members warring against the law of God," Rom. vii. 23. It is a wonderfully strong expression of our slavery to sin. He tells us that it is a law in our members; he means, that it has as full force and power in and over us, as if we really took it for the only law we are bound to, and yielded ourselves wholly to it. And again he says, it "warreth against the law of God," stubbornly opposing him and his will, and setting itself in battle array against him, as one enemy does against another. We should have been utterly at a loss to account for this enmity of our nature to the will and law of God, if the Scripture had not told us how we came into this state. But we find, by woful experience, that we are in it, and the best thing we can do is to let our consciences bear witness to the truth of it. Look at yourselves, at your hearts and lives, at the state of your own souls; read and consider what St. Paul says in the first

and third chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, and elsewhere, of the great and general corruption of mankind; do not deny the charge he brings against every soul of man, on account of some little difference of outward behaviour, in which you may excel many others, but think more especially how you stand affected towards God; let this part of Scripture, which reveals to us our bondage, danger, and misery in sin, have its due weight with you; and then you will be prepared for that other part of it, which discovers to us the way and means of our redemption from this unhappy condition, and brings us the glad tidings of help and deliverance.

IV. Which I am now briefly to set before you, and, with the help of God, shall open more fully in some of the following discourses. Let me just remind you at present of what we read, Acts, v. When the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors to the apostles, he said to them, "Go, stand and speak in the Temple to the people all the words of this life," that is, of life in and through Christ Jesus. Then, if there is any sense, truth, or virtue in these words, we are naturally destitute of spiritual life, must have it restored to us, understand how it is done, and heartily embrace the helps and means which are revealed to us for that purpose. It is my desire to have this awakening passage of Scripture continually sounding in my ears, and I pray God speak it to all our hearts. Life! life! dearly purchased for us, and freely offered to us, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, by nature the children of wrath, and outcasts from God and heaven: what can we desire, what should we think of, but to be recovered to it, and put ourselves in the way of receiving the invaluable blessing at God's hands? All Scripture turns upon these three great points, the fall of man, the desert of sin, and the grace of God in delivering us from

it. Do but admit the two former of these points, namely, that we are fallen from the happy state in which man was created, into a state of great disorder, corruption, and weakness, and that if the guilt of our sin is not taken away it will ruin us for ever, and you will see the necessity of some mighty help: if you are made sensible of the deadly nature of sin, and of your own sinfulness, by spiritual conviction, you will fly to it in the peril of your souls, be very thankful to God for it, and use it to the ends for which it is given. You will understand that as Christ took our curse upon himself, made full satisfaction to the divine justice, and paid the price of our redemption with his blood; so if he had not been made a curse for us, and bore the whole weight of God's vengeance against sin in his own person, the words of the text, so grievous to hear, so dreadfully alarming, must have continued in force against us for ever, "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." My brethren, their sin grieved him; it always grieves him; our sin grieves him, because he sees nothing in it but ruin and destruction. He knows it will rob his creatures of their peace and happiness, destroy their title to the glory he made them for, and plunge them into an abyss of misery. On which account he is said to be grieved; not that he is less happy in himself for any thing we do, but that we might know and consider the sorrow, and trouble, and grief everlasting, we shall bring upon ourselves by sinning against him. Alas! we do; and whatever was the sin of men before the flood, whether it was greater or not than it is at present, we have still cause to lament the prevalence of it, and fear the terrible justice of God, here called his grief, which I have told you is only another word for our misery. And how great it will be if we do not take warning to prevent it, we may judge from the greatness of his mercy, and the

way in which deliverance comes to us. For, blessed be God, his compassions fail not; and though there never was an age of which it might not be said, "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart," yet at the same time it repented him of the evil that was to fall upon us, his bowels yearned over us, and, to the praise of the glory of his grace, he hath not given us up to the desert and punishment of our sin, he hath not left us to perish for ever without remedy, he hath revived us with the hope of the Gospel; the sum of which is, that our deliverance is by pardon, and pardon by Jesus Christ; and faith, or acceptance of the grace in conviction of sin, repentance, and humility, is the heart's recovery to God.

I would now exhort you, dearly beloved, to consider and apply what has been delivered from these words, "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." It must be plain to every understanding that God did not repent of his having made man, so far as he was his own workmanship, for he saw it to be *very good;* but man had corrupted himself, and was become a quite different creature from what he was originally, and it is here said that the Lord was grieved for it at his heart. Nothing can more fully express the misery of our condition in sin; and yet, to the shame and reproach of our nature, as the fallen children of Adam, we are all in it, and "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Gen. viii. 21. Where observe that this is not spoken only, or chiefly, of those who lived before the flood, or perished in it; because it is given as the reason why the Lord "would not again curse the ground any more for man's sake;" (compare Gen. ix. 11.) and therefore must necessarily be understood of those who lived after the flood, or the state of mankind at all times. If we had no other guilt

besides that of forgetfulness of God, contempt of spiritual blessings, and the worldliness of our hearts, it is enough to make good the charge against us. For if we had continued in the image of God, we should have taken him for our Lord and Governor, made him our portion, delighted in his service, and lived in a state of holy communion with him upon earth, till we had been ripe for heaven. But, alas! the malady does not stop here; I mean only in our neglect of God and heavenly things. For David says of mankind, and St. Paul after him, and both by direction of the Holy Ghost, "They are altogether become unprofitable and abominable;" Ps. xiv. 3. Rom. iii. 12; "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." Tit. iii. 3. These again are St. Paul's words, and the wickedness which prevails in the world at all times, the heart of every natural man, bears full testimony to these assertions of the inspired penman. In this lamentable state of our nature God beheld us with an eye of pity; and sent his only begotten Son into the world to rescue and to save us, to die for us and live in us, to make reconciliation for our sins, to be the Lord our righteousness, and bring our straying hearts back again to God in love. He is now preached and offered to you for this end; and you have your choice either to be the children of God in him, holy and beloved, or to be of the number of those of whom it may be said to the last, at the hour of death and the day of judgment, "it repenteth the Lord that ever he made them, and it grieveth him at his heart." Why, if he is grieved, with reverence be it spoken, cannot he find out a way to please himself? Yes; but it will be to the utter destruction of all such; and as Christ wept over the devoted city of Jerusalem, but would not save it from the miseries which were coming upon it, so there is no mercy in God to

plead against his justice for those who do not reverence his Son, and take him for their Saviour from the guilt and power of sin. Why then will you die? Why will you be the men or women of whom these words are spoken? Can you bear to think it? Why then will you not accept of deliverance from the unhappy, perishing state you are in? You think verily you do; and perhaps there are none here present who will take the words of the text to themselves. But as it is for life or death eternal, be not deceived; and you need not, if you would but take notice of the few words more I have to say. If Christ is precious to you as your only Deliverer from the guilt and ruin of your sin, and you trust in him for holiness as well as forgiveness, you have nothing to fear; your state is good, begin how or when it will; you are a Christian, and may welcome death. But if you are ignorant of Christ and his salvation, and therefore certainly without faith in him; if you do not see the necessity of being recovered out of the state of corruption and helplessness you are in by nature; if you deny your sin, or disbelieve what God tells you of the curse of it, or do not repent of it, or think any thing but Christ can take it away; if you do not love the Scriptures, and pray sincerely for the grace of the Spirit, to guide you into the truth, to keep your heart close to God's commandments, and make you a new creature: then what is here said of God's repenting that he made man, must be read thus—it repenteth the Lord that he made YOU. His repenting will be your own bitter, though too late repentance; what is called his grief, you will find to be *your* grief, and the never dying worm at your heart.

Let me in conclusion remind you that this is the first day of Passion week; so called, because in it our Lord suffered to save us all from the curse of the text, "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it

grieved him at his heart." To call us to the right improvement of this holy week, the church has provided a service for every day of it, with suitable epistles and gospels, supposing that to attend upon it is our duty, and that all would do so who are turned or turning to God. If you are really hindered by necessary business, in the field, by daily labour, or otherwise, I have not a word to say in the case; but if your consciences tell you that you are not, and might well spare an hour for the worship of God, and yet you never think of it, consider, I beseech you, which way your hearts are bent. Besides, if the master has a reasonable excuse, the mistress may not; some one or more of the family might be spared to attend upon the service of the church in the name of the rest; and I cannot but recommend it to you to take order for it, that we might have something like a Christian appearance among us, which at present we have not. I have read of one Mr. Herbert, whose endeavours were so blessed to his parishioners, that it is said they would many a time and oft leave their plough, when they heard what they called Mr. Herbert's bell ring to prayers; and I do not believe that any of them were a farthing poorer at the year's end for carrying God's blessing with them to their work. The bells have no such sound here. But whatever excuses you may have to plead for yourselves at other times, sure I am that this season calls for some regard from you; and regard it you would, if the one thing needful was uppermost in your thoughts. Let Good Friday, especially, be wholly a day for your souls. Think why it is so called, and think only how to make it a good day to yourselves, by laying aside all other business to turn your eyes and hearts to the Lord of glory, who was thereon crucified for you. Think what dead worldlings you are, and what a shame it is that you should be all for your bodies, and "labouring for the

meat that perisheth," at the very time of the day when Jesus, he whom you call your Saviour, was hanging upon the cross to save you from the eternal death both of body and soul. When he ordained the sacrament of his Supper, he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." My brethren, he has done something to be remembered by us, in that and all other respects; but if we will not, and thereby show plainly that we neither know him, nor love him, nor desire any of his benefits, we must not hope to be remembered by him when he cometh to judgment in the last act of his kingdom. The Lord call us into it here, that we may be happy in it for ever. Amen.

SERMON XVIII.

Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me. John, v. 39.

It is evident that by the Scriptures here our Lord could only mean the Scriptures of the Old Testament, since no other part of them was written till after his death. And it is as evident also that he here intends to assert, that the Scriptures of the Old Testament *do* testify of him as the Saviour of the world, by whom life and immortality is to be obtained, or redemption from sin, and death the consequence of it. I shall,

I. Give you some opening into this matter.

II. And proceed to show what farther use we are to make of these words. Help us, O Lord, this day; for if thou dost not open our hearts to attend to the Scriptures, and so to understand them as to find the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in them and by them to our souls,

thy mercy in delivering them to us will be lost upon us, and we shall die in our sins.

I. The first thing I am to do, is briefly to open to you what is here affirmed by our Lord, that the great design of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, was to testify of Him as the Restorer of life to lost mankind. "Search the Scriptures," says he; "for in them ye think" (and think truly) "ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me;" as the sole Fountain, Author, and Giver of the life which all want, and for which we must search the Scriptures, if we know the use and intent of them. I say, the Scriptures of the Old Testament; the Jews, to whom these words were spoken, having no other. And this is the point here to be opened, viz. that the Scriptures of the Old Testament do so testify of *Him*. Which will appear plain to you at once, if you consider what is said of St. Paul, Acts, xvii. 2, 3, "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them," (the Jews in their synagogue,) "and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ." Observe; it was his manner, the method he constantly used, to reason with the Jews out of their own Scriptures, and to prove to them from thence, that Jesus was the Christ, the Redeemer they expected. And, therefore, certainly he was revealed in them as such, or else the ground of all the apostle's reasoning would have been false. Again, it is said of Apollos, Acts, xviii. 24, 25, that "being mighty in the Scriptures, he was instructed in the way of the Lord." This was the fruit of his knowledge and study of the Scriptures of the Old Testament (for he had no other), that he found Christ in them. And to put

this matter out of all doubt, I need only mention to you farther what we read, Luke, xxiv. 45—47, "Then opened he" (Jesus) "their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer," (viz. because it was so written) "and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." So that according to Christ's own knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, salvation by him was therein opened and revealed. And I shall now show you very briefly in what parts of it more especially he was so revealed.

When our first parents had broken the covenant of life which God made with them, by transgressing his command, their forfeiture, supposing him to be just and true, was unavoidable. And accordingly death entered into the world by sin; they had lost their title to life and immortality, and without restoration from the unhappy condition into which they had brought themselves, both they and all their posterity must have perished eternally. This they could not do for themselves; they could do nothing to recover their original state, and restore themselves to the divine favour; and therefore God, at the same time that he pronounced their sentence, had in mercy provided a remedy, which he declared to them, for their trust and comfort, in these remarkable words: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," Gen. iii. 15; i. e. one of their posterity, peculiarly so called because he was to be made of a woman, should by himself undo the effect of their sin, and deliver them from the curse they had brought upon themselves, by yielding to the temptation of the devil in the form of a serpent. Here, I say, is a promise of deliverance from the curse of the fall, and of the great Redeemer, Jesus Christ;

which we may suppose was more fully explained to them, and would be carefully explained by them to their children. So that all mankind from the beginning were instructed in this promise; and all who looked for redemption walked with God, and performed all their acts of worship in the faith of it, as the great foundation of their hope.

The next instance I shall mention, is the renewal of this promise to Abraham, that "in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed;" Gen. xii. 3. xxii. 18. And for the confirmation of his faith, and the faith of others, he was commanded to slay his son, and had a ram substituted in his stead, when he was upon the point of doing it: that in this transaction he might behold, as it were, with his eyes, the very manner of our deliverance by the sacrifice of Christ. For so our Lord himself tells us, "He saw his day, and was glad," John, viii. 56. And thus, as Isaac, whose name signifies laughter, or spiritual joy, had the promise of a Redeemer settled upon him, so of his two sons, it was settled and entailed upon Jacob; and again, of all his sons, only upon Judah; and again, of his tribe, upon the person and family of David. Not that the rest of them, or any others, were hereby excluded from the benefit of the Redeemer; but it was done by way of solemn renewal and repetition of the great promise, and to mark out the line by which it was to be conveyed to the rest of mankind. Another very express testimony of which we have delivered to us by Moses, Deut. xviii. 15. "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken:" Him, who in the days of his flesh was declared by a voice from heaven to be the Son of God, and the very Prophet whom all should hear. And that the Jews might want no information in this great article of faith, on which the salvation of mankind turned, they had a great number of sacrifices and ceremonies appointed,

to bring the promised seed to their remembrance in every part of their worship; and the high priest in particular was ordained for a figure or standing memorial of the great High Priest of our profession, and was Christ himself, as it were, continually present with them: Aaron, and every high priest after him, bearing the names of the children of Israel in the breast-plate of judgment upon his heart, as Jesus Christ, our Advocate, bears the names of his people continually upon *his* heart before God. To these, and many other testimonies which might be mentioned, if we add that of the Psalms and prophecies, which speak so largely and plainly of the Redeemer, his person, character, and offices, the time of his coming, birth, sufferings, and death; we shall perceive that St. Paul knew very well what he said, and had good warrant for these words, Rom. xv. 4. "whatsoever things were written aforetime," (meaning chiefly, if not solely, in the Old Testament,) "were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." My brethren, the blessed hope of peace and reconciliation with God, of restoration to life, of happiness and salvation, through him who is the hope of all the ends of the earth, and who alone could do this great thing for us, Jesus Christ the righteous. For "to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins;" Acts, x. 43. That mankind might have hope towards God, notwithstanding their corruption and death by the fall, this promise was given to them from the beginning. They all set out with it at first, and might have kept it; and when it was in danger of being lost or obscured, it was repeated and renewed in the several ages of the world. For there is but one Saviour, and one salvation for all men. There never was "any other name under heaven given unto men whereby we must be

saved," Acts, iv. 12. And those who lived before the coming of Christ, and continued steadfast in the belief of the promised seed, had their faith imputed to them for righteousness, and were equally entitled to the benefit of redemption by Christ with those who lived after his appearance in the flesh. It was in the strength of this faith, that the worthies we read of, Heb. xi. were such shining examples of courage, patience, self-denial, and all kinds of holiness. They lived and died in the same common faith, looked for acceptance with God, and life only in virtue of the promise, despised every thing else in comparison of their great and glorious hope, and the eternal inheritance in heaven which it ensured to them, and for the sake of it willingly exposed themselves to all manner of persecution and suffering from an unbelieving world.

What I have suggested under this head will not be in vain, if it puts any lover of Scripture upon tracing out the evidence of this point in its full extent.

II. Let us now consider what farther use we are to make of the words of the text: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." And what I have to say under this head, shall be delivered to you in the following observations.

1. St. Paul says, "the Lord Jesus Christ is our hope;" 1 Tim. i. 1. He means our only hope; for if there had been any other for sinful lost mankind, he would certainly have told us by commandment from God what it is. You have heard how the promise of a Redeemer from sin and death was declared from the beginning, embraced and trusted in by those who had only the Scriptures of the Old Testament to be the foundation of their faith and hope. Now what cause have *we* of thankfulness to

Almighty God, who have the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament, and thereby a much clearer and stronger light put into our hands, to guide us into the way of life and salvation by Jesus Christ!—the New Testament being to the Old what full corn in the ear is to the seed, its ripening and perfection. What was darkly delivered, and in some measure lay hid in the one, was fully opened, explained, and verified by the other. So that we have greatly the advantage in point of instruction and information in what it so much concerns us to know, above those who lived before the coming of Christ. Was deliverance promised by the seed of the woman? We know who that seed was, and why so called, viz. because he was born of a virgin. Was it foretold that the great Redeemer when he came, instead of appearing in the pomp and state of a messenger from heaven, as might have been expected, should be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief? In the history of his life, answering in all respects to this description, we read of nothing, from his humble birth in a manger to his painful death upon the cross, but poverty, labour, sufferings, and contempt from the world. Was it said that he should bruise the serpent's head? We are clearly told how he did so, Heb. ii. 14. viz. by the sacrifice of himself; "that through death he might overcome him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," who brought death upon all mankind, and would for ever have held them under it, if the Son of God by his death had not set them free. I say, let us observe, and be thankful for our advantage, in the clearer light we enjoy; and also, with how much greater force our Lord's admonition, to search the Scriptures, comes to *us*. "God spake in times past to the fathers by the prophets;" and they had reason to rejoice in the discoveries he made to them. But it is a much

greater blessing to us, that he hath spoken to us by his Son; that the day-spring from on high hath visited us, and that we know the truth and full accomplishment of what our Lord tells us so "many prophets, righteous men, and kings, desired to see."

2. I would observe to you, from the words of the text, that the one great design of *all* Scripture is to testify of Christ, that we have life by him. In this chapter, ver. 25, speaking of his work and office in the world, he says, "The hour cometh, and (N. B.) now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live," i. e. they who are dead in trespasses and sins, and under a sentence of death, shall be released from that sentence, and restored to a capacity of eternal life, by hearing his voice, or believing in him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, having life in himself, and power to communicate it to all who belong to him. The life which God gave to man at his creation, and would for ever have preserved to him in case of obedience, was forfeited by sin; "and so," as the Scripture plainly tells us, "death passed upon all men," Rom. v. 12; and if "the wages of sin," of every sin, "is death," even death eternal, Rom. vi. 23, we have made that sentence our own over and over again, by our transgressions of the law of God, and pulled death upon our heads every day of our lives. Now, seeing that this is our unhappy condition under the fall, ask yourselves the question, What must recover us from it, who shall work our deliverance? Ourselves? So do then; work for life. But remember withal these two things, that in this way the work of your obedience must be perfect; and again, if you could perform it, as you certainly never will, it cannot reverse the sentence of death you are already under, not only for the sin of our first parents, but the countless sum of your own. Fancy to yourselves the greatest saint that ever lived;

and what has he done for the delivery of his soul from that sentence of death which is gone out against all flesh? He will still have sins which he can never answer for to the justice of God. Adam's curse still stands in the Bible, and is always in force against us, for any thing we can do to help ourselves. On both these accounts Christ must have died to save him, if there never had been another man in the world. And God, who perfectly knows our condition of guilt and weakness, does not require it of us that we should by any will, work, or endeavours of our own, recover ourselves out of the dead state we are in by nature, but offers us life in his Son. And if we will not take him at his word, and receive the mercy at his hands, the work of our salvation must be at a stand for ever; for we are as unable to restore to ourselves the life we have lost, as a dead body is to raise itself out of the grave. I beseech you, understand this great, leading truth of our religion, by which we are saved; for it signifies but little what else you learn from Scripture, if you do not find Christ therein revealed for life. It is true, he has explained and enforced the commandments. He strictly requires obedience to them, and enables us to perform it in a much better manner than we could do without him, in a natural state; and the recovery of our wills to God, in truth and sincerity, is a necessary and very precious part of our salvation by him. But this, in the highest state of a pure obedience we shall ever attain to, is not, cannot be our righteousness in the sight of God, nor right to eternal life; concerning which I shall have occasion to speak something more under another head.

3. Let me observe to you, that the life we all want is so only and altogether in Jesus, that it is not in the Scriptures. My meaning is, that the Scripture has not eternal life in itself, but only acquaints us how it is to be

obtained, and where we are to go for it. It is altogether insufficient for this end, and no more life in this sense, than I am for reading and preaching it to you. If you were sick of a mortal distemper, and had a book put into your hands describing the nature of it, and at the same time fully informing you of the impossibility of a cure without going to a certain physician; you would not look for your cure only by reading the book, but be directed by it to go where it is to be had. Behold then the great design, use, and excellence of Scripture. It tells us of our disease, leads us to the root of it, discovers its deadly nature, and our utter inability to help ourselves, points out to us the infallible Physician, guides us to Christ, as the star did the wise men from the East, and, condemns all other methods of cure. To him then we must go, as the blind, the lame, the lepers did, when he was upon earth, tell him of our case, and say as they did, every one of us for ourselves, "Lord, help me!"—"Search the Scriptures," said he to the Jews, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life." So they had; so have we; but how? By receiving their testimony concerning *him* as that life. Mark what he says farther in the following verse; "and ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." The meaning is plain; if we stop short of him, we do nothing; and though we are never so much in earnest, without going directly to him for life, we can only bewilder ourselves all our days in a vain search after it. Discharge from condemnation, sonship, victory over death, and power to obey from the heart, which are the things of our life; as I said before, where can we find them, and how are they to be obtained, but by going to Christ for them, who alone is our peace, righteousness, salvation, and strength? And I observe this to you, because it is both the necessary and the hard point in our religion. It is a sore trial to the soul, and what the generality never

come to, to see itself condemned and helpless, to know its death in sin, and deadness of power. Here we shrink back, would fain help ourselves in some way of our own, try all expedients, and do not choose to go to Christ for the life we want, and he alone can give. But when we do, we are in the true Scripture way, in God's way of help, and cannot fail of our remedy. Now we are at the door of faith; and if we continue knocking, it will be opened to us, and give us such a saving view of Christ and his benefits, as will be the support and comfort of our lives.

4. For in the next place, we may take notice that the way in which Christ becomes our life, is, and can only be, by faith. If salvation is wrought out for us, and a gift freely bestowed upon us, we must receive it as such, under an unfeigned, lowly sense of our utter inability to procure it for ourselves, and with many thanksgivings to God for so unspeakable a mercy. If it is brought and offered to us, we may stretch out our hands to take it; and this is the very thing which is required of us, to put us in possession of it. Christ said to one, "Be not afraid, only believe;" and to another, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth," Mark, v. 36; ix. 23. They wanted a bodily cure; and as they could not help themselves, faith in the grace and power of Jesus was the only method in which they could receive it. We want discharge from the guilt of sin, and deliverance from death; and how can this much greater salvation come to us but in the same way of believing? Hear the Scripture; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts, xvi. 31. Believe that thou art lost and undone in thyself; believe that Christ died for thee by the will of God; believe that he bore thy sins in his own body on the cross; believe, against all thy unworthiness, and all thy fears, that he did not

leave so much as one of them behind to torment and sting thee to death; believe that in him, and him only, thou art restored to the favour of God, and to the power of an endless life, by a participation of his righteousness, as a member of his body; and thou shalt be a saved man. The same apostle says, "I live by the faith of the Son of God;" Gal. ii. 20; and another as full to the same purpose, "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name," John, xx. 31. Indeed, my brethren, these, and many such like passages of holy writ, if you will understand them in their natural, easy import, and in connexion with the Scripture doctrine of man's original sin, accumulated guilt, condemnation, and helplessness, are very, very comfortable and reviving to those who have the sentence of death in themselves, and know how unable they are to reverse it; but in effect rejected by all who fly to their sincerity, good meanings, repentance, or purposes of obedience, instead of acknowledging the truth of their case as fallen sinners, knowing God as he has revealed himself, giving him the glory of his grace, and ascribing the work of redemption solely to Christ. I know it is said that the grand design of his coming into the world was to reform it, and to bring mankind to heaven and happiness, by recovering them to holiness; he having made the way to it more easy, and put it in their power to attain it, by instructing them in the knowledge of the one true God, setting before them a perfect rule of duty, enforcing it by a clear and express revelation of rewards and punishments in a future state, and enabling them by supernatural assistance to discharge it. Blessed be God for all this! Accursed is he who denies it; and may the God of all grace put it in the hearts of his servants faithfully to improve these singular benefits, to adorn their profession, and give all diligence to make their

calling and election sure, by abounding in the work of the Lord. But these are not the most distinguishing peculiarities of the Gospel; this, in its highest state of perfection, is not a justifying righteousness; this is not the redemption and life of the soul, this is not the Scripture testimony to Christ, nor the great design and ultimate end of his coming. Guilt was to be purged, the law was to be fulfilled in every jot and tittle of it, justice and mercy were to be reconciled and meet together in behalf of a world of condemned rebels, the serpent's head was to be bruised, death was to be abolished, and a way opened into heaven for sinners. Will you pretend, can you possibly believe that this is to be done, this work of omnipotence, by what you call your righteousness, and which you have more reason to be ashamed than boast of? And is this all your glorying in Jesus, that he has put it in your power to be your own saviours, and obtain eternal redemption for yourselves, by abating of the rigour of the law, assisting you in the performance of what he demands, accepting of sincerity instead of perfect obedience, and upon the whole making our salvation depend upon lower and easier conditions than it did before? Why, the work is great and difficult beyond all conception. It was infinitely too high for any created being to accomplish; the highest angels have no might for it. None but the eternal Son of God could perform the great, indispensable condition of the covenant of life, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God;" none but he could fulfil the law, which must of all necessity be done in and for the human nature, before we could be reputed just in the sight of God; none but he could pay down the blood which was to be the price of our redemption, and cleanse us from all spot of sin; no other, in earth or heaven, could say, "It is finished," make reconciliation for iniquity, bring in everlasting righteousness, break the

strong bars of the grave, carry up our nature triumphantly with him into heaven, and stand in the same common relation of a Father to us for life that Adam did for death. No, O Jesus! thou seed of the woman, thou sweet and powerful name for condemned sinners, thou quickening Spirit, this is thy work and thy praise. Thou tookest our nature upon thee to do great things for it, to rescue it out of the hands of the devil, to raise it from death, and sit down in it at the right hand of God; and what thou didst was altogether in thy own person, and independently of any of thy creatures. Our peace, our life, was the fruit of thy labours, the reward of thy obedience, the purchase of thy blood, and not any thing which we are enabled to do for ourselves. Thanks be to God, therefore, "who delivered up his own Son for us all," to do what we could not, and to suffer what we should have suffered; that, "believing in him as dying for our offences, and raised again for our justification," confessing our absolute unworthiness, and renouncing every claim of our own to a salvation which is wholly the work of another hand, we might have life through his name. For so, as I am observing to you, we become united to his satisfaction and merits, and are made partakers of his life, in the reality, virtue, and power of it, being so "joined to the Lord as to be one spirit" with him. And you now see why so great stress is laid upon faith in Scripture, and why "it is impossible to please God without it:" because it is acknowledging God to be what he is, in his holiness, justice, and mercy; Christ to be what he is, in the glory of his undertaking for sinners; the Spirit to be what he is, in his principal office of revealing Christ to the soul for life, as first revealed by him in Scripture; ourselves to be what we are, in our wretched condition of guilt and helplessness: it is because without it we deny the truth of God, and whatever else we do in

his worship and service, can only approach him with a lie in our mouths; it is because Christ is freely given to us, and therefore we must receive him in all humility as a gift, beholding him with the eye of faith as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," trusting in God as saving us by the grace of a Redeemer, and receiving us to the fellowship of his life, death, and resurrection.

If you should ask what the faith is by which we receive Christ, and are engrafted into him for life? I answer, the very same that was imputed to Abraham for righteousness — belief of God's promise for the effecting of a natural impossibility, and unfeigned joyful acquiescence in it. Isaac was the blessing promised to Abraham, against the course of nature; Jesus is the Son born, and given to all, that "against hope believing in hope, and though in ourselves vessels of wrath fitted to destruction," we may become children and heirs of God, in his right, and in virtue of the promise. Faith, therefore, in the simple, obvious meaning of the word, is cordial assent to the testimony of God in Scripture concerning the method of our salvation; when, having been convinced of sin, its deadly nature, and our own sinfulness, we can see no way to escape but by flying to the mercy of God in Christ, and gladly embrace it as the relief of our perishing souls. Have you this testimony of your own hearts to your acceptance of the Gospel remedy, that upon the call of God in his word you have come to Christ, as your hope, and the only Saviour of sinners? You need not doubt but that you "have the witness in yourselves," and can say, "that Jesus is the Lord by the Holy Ghost;" you may be as sure that he has wrought this faith in you, as when you see corn and other fruits of the earth come to maturity, you know it is by a blessing from above. Let not your hearts be troubled; let none take your peace

from you, by directing you to inward speakings, feelings, or assurances, as the necessary proofs of your faith. They may be true, they may be false; they are not the general scriptural evidences of faith. Supposing them to be real, they are peculiar vouchsafements to particular persons, for reasons best known to God; but greatly mistaken by those who have them, when they prefer them to a heartfelt dependence on the infallible, abiding testimony of God in Scripture, with a sincere purpose of fidelity, and subjection to the Lord Jesus, and much more when they make them the only tests of a saving faith. If you will build your comfort upon no other ground, you may go sorrowing to your graves: and, what is much to be lamented, you lay a fatal stumbling-block in the way of your Christian progress, by presuming, very unfavourably to yourselves, that as you have not yet received, and been received into Christ by faith, you have neither call nor ability to build up yourselves on it. I say again, have you under a sense of deserved condemnation fled to the name Jesus for safety? Are you come to him to the end he may save you from your sins, both from the guilt and power of them? Do you desire he should, do you think he can, do you believe he will, and that he was ordained and sent of God for this purpose? If this is your real belief and persuasion, though not in the highest measure, grounded on the word of God, and working in you as a living principle, deny it not; lest you wrong your souls, diminish your comfort, hinder your growth in grace, and withhold from God the due tribute of his praise for the knowledge, light, and faith he has given you. On the other hand, let none presume upon the goodness of their state on account of an outward decency of character, human accomplishments, or even regard to the rule of Scripture, without such a faith in Christ as lays them low in their own eyes, brings

them to him in repentance for peace and acceptance with God, and makes him the chief ground of their rejoicing. And especially let none derive hope from the Gospel without coming to Christ as a whole Saviour, with all their sins, with all their needs, for all his blessings, for a pure heart, as well as washing in his blood, and with earnest desire to be renewed by him to universal holiness. In order to which, and to prevent any suspicion of my slighting and undervaluing this necessary part of Christian salvation;

5. Let it be observed, that as we should search the Scriptures, to the end we may believe on the name and power of Jesus Christ, and come to him for the life of our souls; so we must likewise search them to know what he requires of us in all other respects, and what kind of life a true faith will produce in us. Pardon, and peace with God, salvation and eternal life by the grace and might of a Redeemer, without any merit of ours — there is the soul's rest, and the solid ground of our comfort. Believe this with the heart, as God wills and commands, and Christ is yours, to save you from death. But though we must consider this as peculiarly the glad tidings of the Gospel, and the relief of conscience labouring under a sense of guilt and unworthiness, and have the sacred art always to keep it separate in our minds from any work or obedience of our own; yet on the authority of the same Scriptures, which reveal him to us as a Saviour, and the Restorer of our life, we are obliged to submit to his teaching, and receive a law at his mouth. You cannot open the Bible without seeing how hateful sin is to God, what a curse it brings with it, how ruinous it is to all our hopes. The whole Scripture, from beginning to end, is nothing but a history of God's dealings with mankind on account of sin, of his will to punish it, or the methods he has taken to deliver us from it; and Christ's death

upon the cross is such a full declaration of the heinous nature and dreadful malignity of it, and of our certain doom if we continue in it, that it cannot but strike terror into us at the same time that it comforts and revives us. And if the instruction it conveys to us should not be sufficiently attended to, we cannot mistake the plain and positive command, to "add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For so, "and not otherwise," an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;" 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7, 11. His kingdom of grace upon earth is a kingdom of redeemed souls, walking worthy of the mercy they have received, "showing forth the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his marvellous light," in all the fruits of a holy conversation; and though there will always be men of corrupt minds, turning the children's bread into poison to themselves, and denying the Lord that bought them in a fundamental article of his religion, yet the whole word of God stands up against them; and the faith which does not work by love, and sincerely endeavour to keep the commandments, is as certainly false as that the Scripture is true. We read that he said to one and another, who distrusted his power or will to help them, where is your faith? But much more may be said of those, who pretend to believe in him, and yet disgrace their profession, by making little account of that holiness which he so earnestly recommends to them, and so strongly binds upon their hearts and consciences, as the work and proof of their faith. It is a severe rebuke from his mouth — and may he sharpen it to us all — "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Luke, vi. 46. And

surely, besides the authority of his commands, the obligations we have to him strongly plead for our obedience; and thus he calls for it, "If ye love me"—in the character of your Saviour, dying to redeem you, and the Author of all your hopes—"keep my commandments;" John, xiv. 15. I say, what a call is here to every gracious, Christian heart! How dead must all those be who do not hear it; and why do we talk of the goodness of them, when we cannot find one spark of gratitude in them for all he has done and suffered for us? He stooped very low to raise us from the dust, to take us out of the belly of hell, and exalt us to heaven. He could not change the nature of the Most High God, and pull down eternal Justice from its throne; but he could become man to satisfy it, and make a way for mercy to flow in upon us. He could not recal past sin, or make it to be what it is not, unworthy of punishment; but he could take our sin upon himself, and bear the whole weight of God's vengeance against us for it, in his own body on the cross. He could not make us our own saviours; and therefore he would save us by himself, and come into the world to be our life, and to be "made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" 1 Cor. i. 30. And in return for all this, he says, "keep my commandments:" still with a view only to the happiness of his creatures; and that their joy might be full, both in the sense of remission, and the recovery of their corrupt, and therefore miserable natures, to the love of God and holiness.

Oh! then, "search the Scriptures," both for faith and practice; that having the Lord Jesus Christ testified to your hearts, you may walk worthy of him unto all pleasing, and receive the kingdom of God as little children, by the full submission of your wills to his teaching and authority. Let it not seem grievous to you to

take that blessed book, which is the record of God's love and man's salvation, daily into your hands. Let your Sabbaths more especially be devoted to the sacred employment of reading it, with prayer to God that it may be opened to you in the fulness of Christ's blessings. If you had made the glad tidings it brings to sinners your hope, the study of it would be the delight of your souls; you would acquaint yourselves with it more and more, and receive directions from it, as well concerning that hope, as the way that leads to it, and the means of securing it. Your faith would be continually increasing, and your lives answerable to your faith. And if you do not thus value and pray over it, and give up your wills to God in the reading of it, it is a certain sign either that the Spirit's work never began, or is at a stand with you. Certainly the knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent to give life unto the world, is not a matter of small moment; and as you will look for it in vain any where else but in the Spirit's treasury of Holy Scripture, so if you do not look for it there with a care and diligence in some measure suitable to the importance of it, you are yet unawakened and unbelieving. I pray God those may not be vain words to you which you hear so often from the Litany; and that your hearts may answer to them now while I am speaking them to you again: "That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace to hear meekly thy word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, we beseech thee to hear us, good Lord."

SERMON XIX.

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? Luke, xxiv. 26.

THESE words are part of the discourse which our Lord had with two of his disciples, to whom he appeared after his resurrection, as they were walking into the country, and talking together of all those things which had happened to him. They were in the common belief of the Jews, that the Messiah when he came would either set up a temporal kingdom, and make them victorious over their enemies, or restore Paradise to the earth: his death therefore, though it was so plainly foretold by the prophets, and the salvation of mankind depended upon it, was not what they looked for; and it seems as if all their hopes of his working a great deliverance for them were buried with him in the grave. But when they had opened their griefs and fears to him, and told him what perplexity of mind they were under on occasion of his death, especially as there was a report stirring among them that he was risen again, and had been seen by certain women of their company; "he said unto them, O fools," (not in scorn, it was a mild word from his mouth, that is, O inconsiderate men,) "and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself," (ver. 25—27). But notwithstanding their misapprehension of the nature of his kingdom and office, let me tell you these were good hearts, and the men for Christ, though for the present they were overwhelmed with doubts and dif-

ficulties; for when he had spoken these words, and seemed as if he was about to leave them, though they knew not who he was, they liked his discourse, and were very unwilling to part with him. They constrained him, were very urgent and importunate with him, to go into the house, and abide with them that night; and when their eyes were opened to know him, upon his taking bread, blessing, breaking, and giving it to them, and he had vanished out of their sight, "they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (ver. 32.) My brethren, we by the mercy of God have not only the very same Scriptures of the Old Testament still in our hands, but those of the New added to them, for our instruction, assurance, and comfort: and if you should say, we have not Christ to open them to us, as the two disciples had, let me desire you not to entertain any such mistake. For he hath promised to be 'with us alway even unto the end of the world;" Matt. xxviii. 20. He is therefore always present and ready in the power of his Spirit to expound them to every willing soul, and it is our own fault if our hearts do not burn within us at the reading of them. Your diligent study of them will be attended with a blessing; they will be opened to your prayers; you will be made to rejoice in them, and praise God for them. I will be bold to say that Christ is among us this day, with the same love which brought him down from heaven to die for us, to seal the words of the text in all their saving import to every man and woman that is here ready to receive them. Lord Jesus, take the veil from every heart; that we may say from our own experience, with full belief, and many thanksgivings to God for the unspeakable mercy of thy birth, death, and resurrection, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"

The words, you see, consist of two parts, the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow; and the opening of them will afford suitable matter for our meditations on this day and Easter Sunday.

I. The first is the sufferings of Christ, and the necessity of them, strongly expressed in the question, "Ought not Christ to have suffered?" He ought, he did — to fulfil the prophecies concerning him — to redeem us from the death of our souls and bodies — to leave us an example of patience, meekness, humility, and all other divine graces and holy tempers — to turn us from sin to God, from earth to heaven, and fix us in a state of pure obedience from a root of love.

1. That Christ should suffer, was according to prophecy. It was written of him in the first book of Moses, Gen. iii. 15. that though he should "bruise the serpent's head," or destroy the devil's power, which he is always doing, and will do more signally before the end of the world, yet the serpent should "bruise his heel," which was chiefly verified by his death. In the same book it is recorded that his death was revealed to Abraham, who saw it in the command to offer up his son Isaac, the child of promise, and which therefore is appointed to be read for the first morning lesson of this day: and the sacrifices in the law of Moses were so many figures or standing prophecies of the Lamb of God, the one great sacrifice for the sin of the world. The Psalms of David, and those in particular for this day's service, are full in the point. The prophet Daniel says expressly, that "Messiah the Prince should be cut off;" ix. 26; and the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, the first evening lesson, is as plain a description of Christ's sufferings, as if he had been present at the time, and seen them with his eyes. It was therefore necessary, in order to fulfil the truth of

God declared in the prophecies, of which those I have mentioned are but a very small portion, that Christ should suffer. And as it was also necessary in itself, for reasons to be presently insisted on, so, the many prophecies of it having been delivered many ages before, the first of them from the beginning of the world, and continued to the prophet Malachi, about four hundred years before his coming, are not only a full confirmation of the truth of all Scripture, but of great use to reconcile mankind to the belief of a dying Saviour. The thing is strange in itself to the apprehensions of mankind; and the enemies of our faith are always ready with this objection, put into their mouths by the Jews, How can he save others, who could not save himself from the ignominious death of the cross? But you will observe, that the prophecies going before of this matter are a most surprising evidence in the case; and accordingly when our Lord opened the understanding of his disciples to understand the Scriptures, he said unto them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer;" ver. 45, 46. And the apostles themselves likewise knew very well what advantage to make of this convincing argument in their reasonings with the unbelieving Jews, "opening and alleging," from their own Scriptures, "that Christ must needs have suffered;" Acts, xvii. 3. It was necessary in itself, and therefore to meet with the cavils and stop the mouths of unbelievers, it was foretold in a great variety of Scriptures, and as it was foretold by God himself, must be fulfilled.

2. And I am now to show why it was necessary in itself, and in the eternal purpose and decree of God, that Christ should suffer; namely, because there was no other way or means for the redemption of lost mankind.

One of the first things we meet with in the Bible, is the fall of man from that happy state of innocence and

perfection in which he was created, when "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good;" Gen. i. 31. By breaking the law which had been given him by his Maker, he fell under the curse and penalty of disobedience. The word was gone out from the mouth of God, and must of all necessity take place in case of transgression; for the purpose of God is unchangeable; and "he is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent;" 1 Sam. xv. 29. He therefore died the worst of all deaths in the very day of his sin; he lost the life and image of God in his soul, forfeited all right to his favour, and became a suffering creature in a world cursed for his sake, with the sentence of death in his body, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return;" Gen. iii. 19. "So sin entered into the world, and death by sin," Rom. v. 12; death spiritual, temporal, and eternal; and every child of Adam is born in his sinful likeness, of the same kind and nature with the stock it springs from, corrupt and weak as he was after his transgression, and comes into the world under the same sentence of death. This is the Scripture account of our condition under the fall. As to the death of our bodies, we need no proof of it, and are convinced by woful experience that it is the doom of all mankind. But the death of our souls in the loss of God's image, manifested in the alienation of our hearts from him, the stubborn spirit of disobedience and rebellion which cleaves to our natures, the darkness of our understandings, the corruption of our wills, the prevailing sensuality and earthliness of our affections, we are willingly ignorant of; though such a state, which in Scripture account is the death of the soul, is much more to be dreaded than the death of our bodies; and if we are not recovered from it in the time allotted us for working out our salvation, will give us up to "the second death in the lake which

burneth with fire and brimstone," Rev. xxi. 8. "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;" as our Lord himself tells us three times over, that we may take the more notice of it; Mark, ix.

The Scripture is the only book which acquaints us with our danger and misery in sin, the manner of its entrance into the world, the curse which followed upon it, God's hatred of it, and terrible justice in its punishment. And I beseech you not to pass this part of it lightly over in your minds, for it is a most concerning point of knowledge, and, if we will make the proper use of it, gives us a clear insight into the nature of God, the nature of sin, and our condition under it; and from hence likewise it is that we must be furnished with an answer to the question in the text, "Ought not Christ to have suffered?" Man was lost, and could not help and redeem himself. He must have lain for ever under the curse and punishment of sin, if Christ had not taken it upon himself, and delivered him from all the fatal consequences of it, by offering his own spotless soul and body to the stroke of divine justice in our stead. This he did, by the appointment of God, and his own voluntary oblation of himself; for a world perishing in sin was a melancholy spectacle in the eyes of God, and his bowels were moved for us. So Christ satisfied all the demands of law and justice, and undid all the unhappy effects of sin; so he fulfilled the promise made to Adam, of bruising the serpent's head; so he released him and his posterity from the condemnation they were under, and "through death destroyed him that had the power of death, the devil," who had subjected mankind to it; Heb. ii. 14. His sufferings were ours, his death was our death, his life our life, his resurrection our resurrection. He took our nature upon him, that he might sanctify and redeem it to God; and when he gave up his breath in these

words, "It is finished!" he proclaimed aloud from his cross to all the world that sin was abolished, and the curse of it removed from our nature, death conquered, and the gates of heaven again set open for all that would come unto God by him. Now, I say, with this knowledge in your hands, that we all fell and died in Adam, had lost our Paradise, lost our souls, lost our God, and could not restore and save ourselves, you can answer the question, "Ought not Christ to have suffered?" For "by his stripes we are healed, God laid on him the iniquities of us all," and by his death we live. When neither man nor angel could say, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God;" he took a body of our flesh, that by his perfect obedience unto death in our nature, and for our sakes, we might be discharged from the curse and punishment of our sin; and by his one offering of himself, according to the will of God, "he hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified," that is, who come in faith to the fountain opened in his sacred body for sin and uncleanness. So St. Paul argues for the necessity and universal benefit of Christ's sufferings, Rom. v. "that as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin," so there was no other way or means of our being released from sin and death, or attaining to righteousness and life, but by one man Jesus Christ; "who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification;" Rom. iv. 25; and "made sin for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" 2 Cor. v. 21.

But the apostle, in the same chapter, Rom. v. where he is opening this matter to the root, goes a step farther, and proves the necessity of Christ's suffering from another ground. As all mankind were to be born in the condition of their first parents, and became subject to death by their sin, so the goodness of God had provided a remedy for them before the world began, and laid the foundation

of their hope and trust in him, by the promise of a Redeemer, from the moment of their fall; that "as all were concluded under sin, he might have mercy upon all," take occasion from thence to exalt the riches of his grace, and be known to them as the God of love. But observe, never so as to deny himself, never in opposition to his justice, never to dispense with his law, never so as to give mankind reason to believe there is any change made in his nature and will, or that he has less abhorrence of sin at one time than another. Suppose, therefore, that we are released from the guilt and punishment of Adam's sin by the suffering of Christ; yet if God is still the same, and sin the same in all persons in every age of the world, and death the wages of it at all times, where shall we find relief from the countless sum of our own transgressions? If that saying is always in force, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. our souls are forfeited a thousand times over, we pull death upon our heads every day by our own sins; and if the death of Christ does not extend to them, we are still under a sentence of condemnation. Blessed be God, it does; and you shall hear how sweetly St. Paul presents this comfort to our belief and acceptance. "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift," of forgiveness and righteousness by Jesus Christ; that is, exactly commensurate to that one offence of Adam in all points, and no more: "for if through the offence of one many be dead; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, hath abounded unto many." And how does he explain himself upon this head? Why, that we might have no doubt of the great extent and superabundance of the grace of God by Christ, he tells us, as plainly as words can do, that it is an absolute discharge, and full redemption, not only from the guilt of original or birth sin, but from our

own numberless offences against God. And I beseech you to observe carefully, that the apostle's reasoning on the point is clear to this purpose, that as the suffering of Christ was necessary to set us clear of the first man's sin, and release us from the sentence of death which he had brought upon himself and all his posterity, so it was equally necessary to deliver us from the curse of our own; every sin of every single man being always sin in the sight of God, and as such exposing us to a sentence of condemnation. So that we must all say over again, upon our own account, and for a reason which deeply concerns us all, "Ought not Christ to have suffered?" When he spoke these words to the two disciples, he knew very well what he said. He had a piercing view, and full comprehension, of the desperate malignity, odious nature, and infinite evil of sin, of the death to which it subjects us, and of God's eternal, unchangeable justice, though we have not. For though we cannot help knowing and owning it in some measure if we believe the Scripture, yet our apprehensions of the guilt and desert of sin are always weak, and far short of the truth. When God lays the burden of it upon a soul, as he does upon some in sore convictions, it is found to be heavy indeed, and forces the man to cry out, Wo is me, for I am undone! but still it is not understood in its whole length and breadth; the depth of God's justice, the height of his mercy, the curse of sin, and our obligations to the Saviour for delivering us from it, will never be fully known till we come into another world. Let us endeavour, as we are able, to grasp the unsearchable mystery, by looking on the cross, and, that we may better take the dimensions of our sin, dwell more especially on the word CHRIST. Who "bore our sins in his own body on the tree?" Who paid the price of our redemption with his blood? Whose soul was it that was "exceeding sorrowful even unto death?" Who is it whom we behold

ready to sink under a world's guilt in his bitter agony in the garden? Whose voice is that which we hear from the cross, crying out, under a sense of God's wrath, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Not the voice of a man like ourselves; neither was it an angel of the highest order that groaned, and bled, and died for us, in such intolerable torments and anguish of soul as nothing but our sins then laid upon him could cause, and which I pray God we may never feel in our own persons. It was Christ himself, the Son of the living God, who laid from eternity in the bosom of the Father, equal with him in glory and majesty; he it was who thus suffered! And oh, the horrible and extreme curse of sin! he *ought* to have suffered; for no other ransom could be found for us in heaven or earth: none but he could purge our defilement, and snatch us from the brink of hell; nothing but the infinite value and merit of his bloody death could save us from the eternal death of our souls and bodies. O God! let us tremble at thy justice, let us fear thy wrath, let us fall down before thee in most profound adoration for this excess of thy love. Let every one say, O Adam, what hast thou done, thus to expose the only innocent person of all thy race to such unknown pains and sufferings? But let us not stop there; let every man look into, and smite upon his own breast; let every soul say for itself, with one eye upon the cross, and another upon its own guilt, what hast *thou* done, to nail that sacred body to the cursed tree, to afflict that righteous man, to bring him there to be made a sacrifice of atonement for thee, and to wash out the foul stains of thy heart and life with his blood? Whatever thou art in comparison with other men, and though never so high in the esteem of the world for prudence, good-nature, beneficence, and regularity of behaviour; whatever is the form of thy life, or the thought of thy heart, the glorious God-man must have suffered for thee, if there never had

been another sinner upon earth; and if this is not thy knowledge of Christ, thy faith, thy great hope, and the anchor of thy soul, thou art ignorant of God, of sin, of thyself, and not yet a Christian either in belief or practice. For it signifies nothing what else we learn from the Bible, if we are not grounded in this fundamental article of it, that "Christ died for the ungodly, the just for the unjust," and that we ourselves are of that number; and our obedience never is holy and Christian till we have seen the shortness of it in his death, measure ourselves by his rule, make all we do an offering of love to him, and are going on to perfection under the guidance of his Spirit. If, therefore, you would have any benefit from him who says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," Isa. xlv. 22; if you would rejoice in the mercy of this day; if you would look on him as pierced *for* you, look on him first as pierced *by* you. He is the Physician of value for those who are sick, and know their want of him; but in vain do you pretend to believe in him, or apply to him for healing, so long as you think you are whole, more or less, and do not see that sin in yourselves from which he is to save you. As I said before, not the whole of it, for it is an unknown depth; and the sight of all our sin, in all its guilt, would be more than we could bear. But we may and must understand so much of it as is sufficient to humble our proud hearts in the dust; this very persuasion we may have concerning it, that when we have done all we can to attain to a perfect knowledge of it, and aggravated it to the utmost, it is still far greater than any thing we feel or can imagine. "Ought not Christ to have suffered?" Ponder the words, let your faith answer that question, and the sin which now seems little in your eyes will swell to a mountain. If we had been left to estimate our sin, and fix the

price of its redemption, we should never have set it at so high a rate as the blood of Christ; but if we believe that price has been paid for it, we must, on that very consideration, necessarily conclude it to be great beyond all conception. I do not say this to daunt and terrify you, or lead you to despair, but to prevent it, by pointing out your remedy, and the precious means of deliverance from sin, and death the consequence of it. For if the necessity of Christ's suffering affords us a view of our astonishing guilt, on the one hand, the name Jesus is as great, on the other; for our comfort and full relief against all the accusations of conscience, and all our fears of condemnation. If the sin of man is great, surely the blood of God, shed for that purpose, can purge it. Even thine, O sinner! whoever thou art, and how great soever thy sin has been; for, if it pleases God, I would speak glad tidings to thee. Though thou hast wandered never so long from thy heavenly Father, thou hast a thousand calls from him, and a thousand promises to assure thee of a welcome reception upon thy return to him, and every one of them sealed in the blood of Christ. Oh! let them sound deep into thy soul; let thy heart be moved within thee to get an interest in them; give up thy sins for them; run into the arms of thy Saviour. See them, as on this day, stretched out wide upon the cross to embrace a world: hear thy salvation pronounced by him in the last words he ever spoke, "It is finished!" Only do not delude thyself with a vain hope of being accepted to it in a hardened impenitent state; do not so dishonour the holy Jesus as to make him a minister of thy sin. He died for thee because it has slain thee, and would have brought thee to the place of everlasting torment; but if thou dost not see the reason and necessity of dying to it in his death for it, thou art one of those who crucify him afresh: thou tramplest

the blood of the Son of God under thy feet, and if death finds thee in this state, mercy is at an end with thee for ever.

But methinks I hear some complaining that they do not mourn enough for sin, and that the sense of it does not lie so heavy upon them as they think it ought to do. Probably they do not; but nevertheless to them I say, refuse not your comfort upon any such pretence. Christ is for you whenever your eyes are opened to see your sin, and will in nowise reject you when you look to him for salvation from it. I do not advise such to grieve no more for sin, for it is always a grief of heart to every sincere Christian, and none mourn so kindly over it as those who believe it is forgiven; but then I am sure they wrong their souls every way, go without their best comfort, and hinder their progress, by poring over it all their days, without looking to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. "He ought to have suffered;" he did suffer; and why not for you, when you know your want of him, and are troubled in seeking him? Call to mind those words, Rom. viii. 31—35, "What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? It is God that justifieth," by the death of Christ, "who is he that condemneth?" I say, let these, and many other such words, lie as a cordial at your heart; and never be so foolish as to condemn yourself, when the will of God is declared to you in such strong terms for your eternal justification, and you have such a precious antidote against all your fears in Christ crucified.

Finally, my brethren, "the Lord Jesus Christ is our hope," 1 Tim. i. 1; the only hope of all saints and sinners; and blessed be God for it. If we had known by nature, as well as we do by the death of Christ, what an evil case we are in by sin, both as children of a condemned father, and actual transgressors ourselves, how

could we ever assure ourselves of forgiveness? And if, either through unbelief or continuance in sin, we go without the remedy which has been brought to us from heaven, where shall we look for another? If God had not provided himself a lamb for a burnt-offering, where should we have found one? And if Christ had not been that Lamb, not one sin could have been taken away. I say, what else have you to trust to, and what is it that you would put in the place of Christ and his cross? Your duties, your good meanings, your sobriety, and fair character? Alas! in the generality they are far to seek; but if they were as real as they are pretended, great is your blindness, great is your presumption, and great will be your condemnation, if you have nothing better to ground yourselves upon for life. You have sin cleaving to all you do; and what, then, are you doing in the great concern of dealing with God about the acceptance of your souls, but coming to him with a lie in your right hand, and covering your sins by more sin? Know your nakedness, know your shame, know your guilt, and confess it humbly to God, that you may be received to the grace of forgiveness. Christ will cover all your sins; but if you do not come to him for washing in his blood, and receive him by faith as your atonement and peace-maker with God, they are all upon record, and standing out against you to this hour. He can save you as sinners, and when you are laid low enough in your own eyes to be saved by him; but has nothing to do with those who exalt their own works against him, and look for strength, righteousness, and salvation in themselves. They are blind in the very point which makes a Christian, and distinguisheth him from all other men, namely, "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14. For there never was a true Christian in the world who did not

find rest for his soul in this belief, and make it the ground of his hope towards God. To confirm us in this faith more and more, and that we might hold fast this blessed hope, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was appointed, in which Christ is evidently set before our eyes crucified. His body broken, and blood poured out for us, are therein represented to our senses, and all the benefits of his passion sealed and conveyed to us. What those mean by calling themselves Christians, who coldly turn their backs upon it, what knowledge they can have of Christ, or themselves, what faith in him, what desire to be partakers of him, they would do well to consider; I fear the case is too plain, and pray God to make it as plain to their own hearts and understandings, that Christ is nothing to them.

Besides the two reasons already opened for the necessity of Christ's suffering, namely, to fulfil the prophecies concerning him, and to redeem us from the death of our souls and bodies, I mentioned another, which was, to leave us an example of patience, meekness, and humility, to fill our souls with devout admiration of his graces and holy tempers, to turn us from all sin, and confirm us in all duty: but this will be more properly spoken to under the second particular in the text, namely, the glory that should follow upon his suffering. The Lord make our hearts burn within us to hear of it! May the prayer of Jesus to the Father be effectual on our behalf, that we also may be given to him, and being washed in his blood, and prepared by faith and love, "may be with him where he is, to behold his glory!" John, xvii. 24.

II. We are to consider our Lord's entrance into glory, what it is, how we are concerned in it, and what use it will be of to us to take the best view of it we are able.

He was glorious in his birth, and all the acts and

passages of his life, glorious in his miracles, glorious in living for no other end than to do good, glorious in the perfection of his obedience; and "though he was crucified through weakness," 2 Cor. xiii. 4. submitted to it as one of the weakest and vilest of men, yet in the sight of God and his holy angels he was exceeding glorious in his death. But still there was a glory to follow upon his sufferings, as the reward of them, of a different kind from all that went before, and in which, if I may so speak, he was to appear like himself—the glory of his resurrection and ascension, mission of the Holy Ghost, and sitting at the right hand of God in that fulness of power with which he is invested for the carrying on all the ends of his incarnation and death, and in order to his bringing many sons unto glory; together with that last, awful act of his office, when he shall sit upon the throne of his glory to judge the quick and dead. He manifested his glory when he was upon earth; "and we beheld it," says St. John, "as the glory of the only begotten of the Father," i. 14. To those who did not see it in the days of his flesh, a whole assembled world, he will manifest himself in all the glory and majesty of his grace and power, either to save, or sentence them to depart from him for ever.

To this end, "that he might be Lord both of the dead and living," Rom. xiv. 9, he rose again. His resurrection, therefore, was the first act or manifestation of that glory which was to follow upon his sufferings. To this he referred the unbelieving Jews more than once, as most convincing proof of his being the Christ; "Destroy this temple," pointing to his body, the living temple of God, "and in three days I will raise it up," John, ii. 19. Matt. xii. 39, 40. And with this assurance he constantly supported and comforted his disciples; and whenever he acquainted them with the necessity of his death, to their exceeding great amazement, he revived

their hopes with this declaration, "the third day I will rise again." The necessity of his resurrection is apparent; the glory of it was great, and a strange thing in the earth. If he had not risen again, the Jews would have triumphed in their rejection of him, and the world would have joined with them in concluding that he was a deceiver. That he did rise again, as he had foretold, and was thereby "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness," Rom. i. 4, is such a firm foundation of our faith in him as cannot be shaken. And as the whole weight of our faith was in a manner to be laid upon that single point, and the testimony which the apostles gave to it, so they were furnished with all the necessary proofs of it, he being seen of them, eating, drinking, and conversing with them, forty days after his resurrection, with the same body which was crucified, and with the marks of his crucifixion upon it, and in their sight ascending with it into heaven. Blessed be God, in our nature, and with our nature in himself! He rose again in it, and carried it with him into heaven; and by so doing, conquered death, not for himself, but in our stead, and is gone before to prepare a place for us in his Father's house, where believers are now in his right, in virtue of their resurrection and ascension with him as members of his body, and must infallibly be received to him, to be where he is in their own persons, if they cleave to him as their head, and "hold fast the beginning of their confidence unto the end." Heb. iii. 14. "If ye then be risen with Christ," says St. Paul, Col. iii. 1: speaking of it as a matter undoubted and evident from the whole nature and design of Christ's undertaking for us, that his members are so risen; for he did not die, nor rise again, nor ascend into heaven, for himself. And to the same purpose he says expressly, that "God hath raised us," all true Christians and believers, "up

together, and hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" Eph. ii. 6. But though Christ was quickened by the Spirit, and raised in glory, and ascended into heaven, as it was necessary he should, to prove himself to be the Christ, to enter into heaven for us as our forerunner, and take possession of it in our names; yet both these are not the completion of his glory, but parts of it, and chiefly preparatory to that higher degree of glory to which he was to be received, and is now possessed of at the right hand of God.

It is the surpassing glory of Christ, that as man, and for the sake of what he did and suffered for man, he is exalted in dignity and pre-eminence above the whole creation of God, "has all power given him in heaven and earth," and is appointed "the Head over all things to the church, which is his body, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him," acting under his command, "and sent forth" by him, "to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation." Matt. xxviii. 18. Eph. i. 22, 23. 1 Pet. iii. 22. I say, you are to observe carefully that these things are spoken of him as man; for as God much more than all this was his right from all eternity; and St. Paul is very clear in the reason of his exaltation, it was because "he took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross: wherefore," says he, "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father;" Phil. ii. 6—10. As he took our nature upon him, and with it our sin, that in it he might make satisfaction to the divine justice, and executed the Father's will by laying down his life for the redemption of lost

mankind; so the reward is conferred upon him in that very nature, and he is now set down in it at the right hand of God, with authority in his own hands to carry all his gracious designs for our good into effect, and dispense all the purchases of his life and death: of which the first was sending the Holy Ghost.

He did this remarkably at the day of Pentecost; he is always doing it, though more secretly, and must do it in every soul that is saved, according to his own peremptory assertion, twice repeated to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven," John, iii. 3, 5. We are commanded to "repent, and believe the Gospel," and told that by "grace we are saved, through faith," and that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Mark, i. 15. Eph. ii. 8. Heb. xii. 14. And the design of these declarations is to convince us that so it must be, and to show us wherein our salvation consists. But then, lest we should mistake him, and look only to ourselves for power and ability to attain to repentance, faith, and holiness, we are told as expressly that Christ "is exalted to the right hand of God, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance, and forgiveness of sins;" that "faith is the gift of God;" and that it is "God who worketh in us both to will and to do," namely, by his Spirit, whose office it is under Christ "to reprove," or convince, "the world of sin," to show us the righteousness of Christ, by the faith whereof we are saved, and to "judge the prince of this world," by casting those lusts out of our hearts, which are the devil's power over us, and strength in us; Acts, v. 31. Eph. ii. 8. John, xvi. 8—11. And that we have such an almighty helper, to work in us repentance and faith, to guide us into all truth, and confirm us in the love and practice of it, to receive of the things of Christ, to show and to

testify them to us, is a most excellent part of the glory to which he was advanced after his resurrection and ascension, the peculiar privilege and great blessing of the Gospel times, purchased for us by his merits and sufferings. By him he communicates himself, the healing virtue of his blood, the quickening power of his grace, to the church, and to the souls of believers; by him he lives and reigns in us; by him he gives us power to become the sons of God, and sends him as the Spirit of adoption into our hearts; he it is who enlightens our understandings, renews our wills and affections, sanctifieth our spirits, souls, and bodies, supports us in all our difficulties and distresses, excites us to prayer, helps our infirmities in it, and seals us unto the day of redemption, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come in his glory to judge the quick and dead, to receive his faithful servants to himself, and doom the wicked to their own place; and then, after this concluding act of his glory, as man, "deliver up his" mediatorial "kingdom to God, even the Father, that God," in Trinity, "may be all in all;" 1 Cor. xv. 24; the distinct offices of Father, Son, and Spirit, having had their effect, and then ceasing for ever. In the meantime the kingdom is in his hands; "for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell, that he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth, even in him:" he being appointed the head of rule to angels and men, that under him they might be one family, and one body, knit together in one communion and fellowship of love, adoration, and holy offices, and all praising God through him, and for him, in time and eternity. 1 Cor. xv. 25. Col. i. 19. Eph. i. 10. Rev. v. 11—14.

Surely, my brethren, these things greatly concern us; for the glory of Christ is the salvation of man. All he did

and suffered for our sakes, was for the glory of his grace and love; the glory which followed upon his sufferings was given him as the reward of his undertaking and accomplishing the work of our redemption from sin and death, and it is the glory of his power to be employed for this end. He is continually interceding for us at the throne of grace, and with the same bowels of compassion which brought him into the world to die for us, presenting his blood before the mercy-seat in heaven for our pardon and acceptance with God; he sends the Holy Spirit to quicken our dead souls, to unite us to him by faith, and set him upon his throne in our hearts; he has given us his rule to be our guide, and conducts us to happiness in the highway of holiness; he sends forth his ministering spirits to guard and protect us in all our dangers; he has his eye always upon us for good in all the passages of our lives; and "the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation;" John, v. 28, 29. What a call is there in all this to the poor soul, lying in darkness and the shadow of death, with heaven opened to it on one hand and hell on the other, to know and consider, to understand and receive the mercy of the Gospel, to lift up its eye to the glorious hope which is set before it, to run into the arms of the Saviour, to fulfil the joy of his heart, and answer the ends of his glory, by putting itself into his hands for happiness and salvation! It is a most astonishing view of the danger of our condition, of God's knowledge of it, and infinite tender concern for us in it, which is given us in that passage of St. John, where it is said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life;" x. 17. Because, in obedience to the Father, and moved by his own free love, he would bear our sin and punishment in

his own body, ransom us from death with his life, rescue and save us at any rate from the misery we were fallen into; therefore (mark it well) "the Father loved him," and put him in possession of that glory, which I have briefly represented, but which all our thoughts cannot reach in this state of imperfection. What cause have we to say with the same St. John, "We love him, because he first loved us!" 1 Eph. iv. 19. How can we help every one of us calling out to Jesus, "Lord, remember me in thy kingdom?" Give me such a sense of thy almighty love, such a sight of thy excellent glory, to which thou art exalted in and for our nature, that my heart may burn within me night and day to be partaker of it; that thou mayest be glorified in me, and that my soul may bless thee for the great things thou hast done for me, a poor worm, sinful dust and ashes. God forbid that we should lose our portion in him, forfeit our inheritance, and sell our birthright for a lust, for the world, or any thing it can give us. "Beloved," says St. John, "now are we the sons of God," that is, by faith and love which is in Christ Jesus, if we are so at all; "And it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is;" 1 John, iii. 2. Let us raise our thoughts and wishes to this blessed hope, for the apostle gives us to understand that it is glorious beyond all that we can conceive; let us summon all our powers to secure it; let us resolutely put ourselves in the way to it, by "purifying ourselves even as he is pure;" ver. 3. let us keep our eyes steadily fixed on the glory of Christ in every part of it, that we may make our advantage of it for attaining to that sight, and by it to a likeness with him, and meetness for the everlasting enjoyment of him, and of God through him. If he is risen, it is that we may rise with him, and as persons dead to our old state, in sin, or worldliness and

unconcern for the soul, from henceforth live unto him that died for us, according to his rule, after his example, by his Spirit, to the glory of God. This he accounts the glory of his resurrection; and thus we shall know the power of it, in newness of life here, in the full virtue and benefit of it hereafter; when "He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, and change their vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself;" 2 Cor. v. 15; 2 Thess. i. 10; Phil. iii. 21. If he ascended into heaven, we also must in heart and mind thither ascend, dwell with him in our affections, gladly receive of those gifts which in his royal state he is entrusted to bestow, and make it the great business of our lives to prepare to follow him, that we may be where he is, to behold the King in his beauty. If it is his glory to send the Holy Ghost, to open our hearts to receive him in all his offices, and make his life and death effectual to our salvation; what can we think of this, but that the Spirit of faith and holiness is one of his best and most necessary gifts, and that from hence alone we derive all our strength, sufficiency, and comfort? If he has all power given him for our benefit, how can we answer the end of that donation, or promote his glory, but by being made partakers of it, and receiving power from him to become the sons of God? If he is the Head over all things, it is that we may be gathered to him as members of his body into that one society which is blessed through him, be supplied continually out of his fulness, and live by his life. If the Lord Jesus will come in the glory of his Father, and in his own glory, and of the holy angels, to raise us from our graves, and call us before his judgment-seat; oh! what should be the use and improvement of this, but to set us all on fire to meet him with joy at that awful time,

and have our place at his right hand for ever! And if we are not thus prepared for his second coming, his sufferings, and every part of his glory, will then turn to our everlasting confusion. His sufferings on our behalf will be the seal of our condemnation; his resurrection, and ascension, that we might rise with him, and ascend to him; his sitting at the right hand of God, to govern, protect, and bless us; his Spirit offered in vain; his grace abused, his benefits despised, his love repaid with unkindness: all will sit heavy upon our souls, upbraid us for our folly with terrible aggravation, and be the never-dying worm at our hearts. To prevent your falling into this misery, if it pleases God, let me now speak a word to you of what I mentioned as a third reason of his suffering, and what it belongs to his glory to bring us to; namely, that he suffered to leave us an example of patience, meekness, and humility, to fill our souls with devout admiration of his graces and holy tempers, to turn us from all sin, and fix us in a state of pure obedience from a root of love.

He was Immanuel, God with us, God in our nature, to show us by a living example what we ought to be, and what we shall be, when God is in us; meek and patient, humble and contented, dead to the world, ready to suffer for the will of God, and setting him before us as our pattern in all things, that we may copy after his holiness, and be changed into the same image. "If any man serve me," says he, "let him follow me;" John, xii. 26; that is, in the way he has marked out for all, by living up to his rule, and treading in his steps. And the meaning is evident, that if we do not thus follow him, we cannot be his disciples; in vain do we expect to be owned by him, or honoured by his Father. "Where I am," says he again, "there shall also my servant be." Blessed call and encouragement to well-doing! he means in heaven;

but observe, he says *my servant;* plainly giving us to understand, that if we are not first with him in service here, receiving his commands, doing as he did, living as he lived, endeavouring and praying to be established in his graces and holy tempers, we cannot be with him in glory hereafter. It is his glory to make us meet for heaven, by renewing us to his likeness; and "for this purpose was he manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil;" 1 John, iii. 8; by turning us from all sin, and creating us to the desire and love of holiness; but if we do not look for it at his hands, and receive him as our Saviour in this respect also, we utterly mistake one great end of his coming. If there is any thing plain in Scripture, it is, that if we will not be his children by similitude of nature, study his example, and imitate him in his life, we can have no benefit of his death. "Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus," says St. Paul, speaking of his great humility and self-abasement, and to provoke us by such an unparalleled instance of it to be lowly in our own eyes, to bear with the infirmities of others, to look with tenderness and pity on their faults, to fear for ourselves, and endeavour to restore them in the spirit of meekness; Phil. ii. 1—5; Gal. vi. 1—4. And on the same consideration St. Peter exhorteth to patient continuance in well-doing, whatever we suffer for it; telling us, that "even hereunto are we called, because," says he, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously;" 1 Eph. ii. 18—23. This therefore was one end of his sufferings, that we might learn of him; and he then "sees of the travail of his soul in us, and is satisfied," when we walk with God as he also

walked, and as true members of his body conform to our Head in all things. He calls us to it, and strictly requires it of us; and his love, if we are grounded in it, will constrain us to it. What has he not done for us, and what cause have we to cry out with admiration and great astonishment, "Behold, how he loved us!" The glory he was possessed of at the right hand of the Father relinquished, to come into a world of sin and misery—his body nailed to the cross—his blood poured out like water—his hands and feet, heart and head, all pierced—his soul oppressed with the weight of God's vengeance, and almost sinking under the pains we should have endured—death overcome, heaven opened, his power employed, his Spirit given to bring us to it—what shall we say to all this? What can move us, what can melt down our stubborn hearts, and draw some suitable returns of love from them, if this does not? We know that what he desires, and all he desires of us, in return for his love, and as the proof and fruit of our faith, is to keep his commandments; that is, to be as happy here as we can be, and to come to his glory in the same way of holiness he went before us. And we are assured that "if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death," believing that in and with him we paid the debt of sin, and died to the condemnation of it, and on that ground dying to sin, and living unto God in the truth of a pure obedience, "we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; have our mortal bodies quickened by the same Spirit which raised up him from the dead," to sit down with him in his kingdom, and enjoy all the fruits of his life, death, and resurrection, at God's right hand for evermore.

O Jesus, have mercy on us, and grant us thy peace. Let us have no rest till we are seeking after it, till we are established in it. Take possession of our souls and bodies, raise up thy own life and likeness in us; that in

the faith of thy love, and the power of the eternal Spirit, we may do all such good works as thou hast appointed for us to walk in, lie down in our graves with the seal of God in our foreheads, and rise again to meet thee with joy at thy second coming, to the everlasting praise of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

SERMON XX.

Send to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. Acts, xi. 13, 14.

WHAT those words are whereby Cornelius and his house were to be saved, and by which every man and woman to the end of the world must be saved, you will hear by and by. But I must first open the occasion of them, and give you some account of the method by which he was brought to the knowledge of Christ.

Let me say to you, my brethren, in the awakening call of our blessed Saviour, "If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear." Words whereby we and our houses must be saved! Eternally saved! How important, how awful is this! How should every earthly concern shrink into nothing, how should every imagination of man's heart die away, at the thought of that eternal state of being, which every one here present must enter upon within a few years, and some perhaps in a few weeks! What care should we take to be upon a right foundation here! And how should it put all the powers of our souls, in motion to secure that grand point, an interest in the Saviour, and a well-grounded hope of being for ever happy with God! It is true, great is our blindness, great is our

sin, great is our unworthiness. But nevertheless the God who made us for himself has rich mercy in store for us; and nothing shall by any means hurt us, if we turn to him in repentance, embrace the knowledge he offers us, and accept his covenant of peace. He will still be our God, "to bless us in turning away every one of us from our iniquities," Acts, iii. 26. As upon this day he sent down the Holy Ghost, to take possession of our natures, to quicken our dead souls, to alter the vicious bent of our affections, to conquer the stubborn opposition of our wills, and to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ, with all his benefits, to the hearts of all faithful people; and as sure as he fell on Cornelius, and those with him who heard the word, so surely will he be an almighty Helper and abiding Comforter to every man, of every nation under heaven, who chooses his comforts, and puts himself into his hands for faith in Christ, newness of life, and strength to do the will of God; so surely will he open the eyes of all who desire it, "turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may obtain remission of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus." Acts, xxvi. 18.

To give us all possible assurance of this, that God has opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, and granted them repentance unto life; to set before us the necessity of being grafted into Christ for the remission of sins, and that he may dwell in us by his Spirit, and make us living temples of the living God—is the design of this instructive passage of Scripture which I am now going to open to you. The Lord open it to your hearts this day by the working of his mighty power, and make it effectual to your calling and salvation!

Cornelius, a centurion, or captain of a band of soldiers under the Roman governor, by living amongst the Jews

had gained such a knowledge of their religion, and entertained such a liking to it, as to live according to the rules of it. Amongst them he had learned to worship the true God, to fast and pray, and give much alms, and led a strict, devout life. But still, not being circumcised, he could not be reputed a Jew. And therefore the apostles, who as yet did not know that the Gospel was to be preached to any but Jews, could not make an offer of it to him, as he was not in all points converted to the Jewish religion; thinking it unlawful to keep company with or come unto one of another nation. But God, whose mercy is over all his works, who had determined, in his own good time, to break down the middle wall of partition betwixt Jew and Gentile, and make of both one body under one Head, Jesus Christ, thus makes way for his own purpose. In one vision he directs Cornelius to send for Peter, to tell him what he should do in order to his salvation. In another, to Peter, in which he "saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending to him as it had been a great sheet, knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air: And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill, and eat;" i. e. of all or any of the creatures which he saw, without distinction of clean or unclean — God showed him that he "should not call any man common or unclean," or refuse to converse with him under that notion. And lest he should mistake God's meaning and design in the vision, while he was musing upon it, the Spirit said to him expressly, "Behold, three men seek thee; arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

When you read that Cornelius was the first man from among the Gentiles who was brought to the faith of Christ, let it not pass without some reflection; let me

instruct you a little what observations to make upon it. What God had so long foretold, and so often promised, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs with his people, children of the covenant, and partakers of the heavenly calling, was now, in this instance, solemnly and remarkably fulfilled. This was the very time and place of God's signing and sealing to all his promises in behalf of the Gentiles. Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, was now proclaimed to all, and Christ herein fully explained his commission to the apostles, to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Before this, mankind sat in darkness and the shadow of death, were outcasts from mercy, without hope and without God in the world; i. e. as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, but lived in ignorance and forgetfulness of him, without regard to his will, or seeking to him for a blessing upon their souls. But now the gates of Paradise were again set wide open, and abundant entrance was ministered to us into the love and favour of God, and a way made for the fulfilling of that saying, "Many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." So that this is a leading case, and Cornelius is, in a sense, the father of us all. Christ purchased eternal redemption for us, and our eyes and hearts must be to him, as the blessed Author of it; but we hold of Cornelius, as it were, for its conveyance to us, and settlement upon us. In him the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles; in and through him the ever-blessed Spirit returned to take his abode with them, and, by God's calling and acceptance of *him*, we are infallibly assured that he now reputes no man, of any nation, common or unclean; i. e. so as to be incapable of his favour, and unfit for redeeming mercy, if he does not make himself so, by choosing the pollu-

tions of his own heart and nature, and refusing to come to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. God be thanked for Cornelius, and for this declaration and great example of his free general mercy to all mankind in him! God be thanked for sending Peter to every one of us, when he sent him to Cornelius, with an offer of grace and salvation! Blessed be God for this solemn opening of his covenant of peace to us, for sending down the Holy Ghost upon the Gentiles, and for recording this in sacred Scripture for our comfort and assurance!

But let us attend to another very important particular in this remarkable story of Cornelius. We are told, Acts, x. 2, 22. that he "was a just, devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." Now here you will be ready to ask, what could this man want more for his salvation? If a course of justice, alms-giving, and strict devotion, if a proper regard to all the duties we owe to God and man, will not entitle us to heaven, what will? Alas! you may say (and I wish you were so far awakened as to say it with true concern for yourselves), this is a great deal more than we do, or think necessary; and if much less will not prevail for our acceptance, how shall we stand before God, and where almost is the man or woman amongst us who can have so much as a faint hope of being saved? We do not watch unto prayer, so as to be hard at work with God in it day by day for spiritual blessings. We do not devote a reasonable part of our substance to God in works of charity, as knowing that we receive it from him in trust, and are only stewards of what he gives for such uses as he appoints. We are not generally strict moral men in our dealings, but lay fatal snares for the life of our souls, and fall in too much with the way of the world, in frauds, and tricks, and lying for gain. Alas! we do not serve Almighty God in and

with all our houses, in any constant method of daily devotion; and if it was not for Sunday's religion, which is set out to our hands, and, as it were, forced upon us, our families would hardly know, by any thing we say or do at other times, whether we so much as believe there is a God, who is to be loved, served, and worshipped by us. I pray God send this rebuke to your hearts, for we are a dead people; and I fear it cannot be said of many of us, that we outstrip the heathens in the practice of a hearty free devotion towards God, or our conscientious dealings with one another. And what, then, shall we do, when God entereth into judgment with us? for these things are on all hands allowed to be proper, if not necessary, marks of true religion; and, without them, neither Cornelius, nor any other man upon earth, could be accepted. But still, you will say, why could he not be accepted with and for them, for his justice, his alms, his prayers, or *without* any thing else? God be merciful to us! what could he want? I will tell you: he wanted what all want; he wanted Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; he wanted the healing virtue of his most precious blood, to wash out the foul stains, both of original and actual pollution; he wanted the merits of his all-sufficient sacrifice, and perfect righteousness, and the application of them by faith to his own soul; he wanted the Holy Spirit, to enable him for this believing application, and to make all his graces truly so; nay, he wanted repentance unto life, as saint-like and as good as he was; and if he had not prostrated himself at the foot of the cross with this confession in his mouth, breathed from the bottom of his heart, as all must who come to Christ for salvation — "God be merciful to me a sinner!" he could have had no benefit from him. Here, therefore, is a man for God's purpose, to give us the strongest information, and the clearest possible evidence, in a necessary

point of belief; here is one singled out to convince the world of sin, and show men to their faces, that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" here is one who could have stood upon his own bottom, if ever any man could, and yet we are plainly given to understand, that if Christ had not been preached to him, and received by him, he could have had no title to eternal life. For though these words at first hearing may seem to sound otherwise, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but, in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him," x. 34, 35; as if honest, moral men, so called, in all parts of the world, would be accepted without any more ado, and for the sake of their own righteousness; yet this portion of sacred Scripture is a direct confutation of that notion. For else, why should a method have been taken with Cornelius, one of the best of men; what need was there of vision upon vision to bring him to the knowledge and belief of Christ, if he could have been accepted without him? And what stronger proof can we have than this instance, that "there is salvation in no other; no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved?" Acts, iv. 12. I say again, this one instance casts down all our towering thoughts of ourselves, and levels all, the best and the worst, in point of justification with God. And as other parts of sacred Scripture invite sinners, and give encouragement to the greatest of sinners to cast themselves upon Christ, so this was written to show us, that out of Christ all are and will be reputed of God as sinners, and that none must plead themselves, or their own works, how specious soever, as the ground of their salvation. No, my brethren; mercy we all want; and whoever they are who will not sue for it to the throne of grace, in a humbling sense of their vileness and misery, have a fiery trial to go through. Christ rejects none that come

unto God by him; but one sin unpurged with his blood will quite dash all our plea of merit, and sink us to hell. If this sound harsh, and you will still think that some reckoning may well be made of what you call your good hearts, good meanings, and good actions, I must tell you farther, that you have not so much as one perfectly good action, free from all spot of sin, to show for yourselves in your whole lives; and then what will you do with all the rest? And as for the good hearts we talk of, I am sure that is a naughty, proud heart, stark blind, and full of hypocrisy, guile, and rebellion, which will not stoop to Christ, suffer all its imaginary perfection to be torn from it, and be a debtor to God for his mercy. Look to it, for evil is before you; there is no trifling with this sacred, fundamental point of Christian belief, that it is Christ "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30; that "by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God;" Eph. ii. 8. Think with yourself, what are you beyond other men, and what have you done to enable you to lift up your face with confidence before God, defy his justice, and challenge his heaven as the due reward of your deeds? You are no extortioner, unjust man, nor adulterer; you have a fair character in the world, and do much to justify yourself before men. But you do not fast twice in the week, nor perhaps twice in a year, upon a religious account; you do not give alms in proportion to your estate; you do not pray always, continually in the bent of your heart, daily in secret, and at the times and seasons of public prayer in your parish; you do not fear God with all your house, so as to set up his worship in it, and teach all that belong to you to fear him. But still, if you fasted, and prayed, and gave much alms, as Cornelius did; if you could say with St. Paul, that you know nothing by yourselves, and

as touching the righteousness which is of the law are blameless; if, like Job, you were perfect and upright, fearing God, and eschewing evil; yet if the foundation of all you do is not laid firm and sure in the blood of Christ, and faith in him by the Holy Ghost, you build with untempered mortar; all this goodly fabric of your own raising must be thrown down, and not one stone left upon another. Still this is man's righteousness, and not God's; it may do well enough for this world, and promote the satisfaction of your lives in some degree, and procure you the esteem of men; but it is not, cannot be the ground of eternal life, and, if you make it the ground of your trust, will ruin you for ever. Still you are but just where Paul was when God struck him to the earth with a light from heaven; still you are not come to Job's confession, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes;" still you are in the same condition that Cornelius was before his conversion, and may learn from his story, that before you can have hope towards God, you must "send for Peter, and hear words whereby you must be saved." Plead what you will for yourselves; if you could say to God, what you know you cannot say—'Lo, here is a fair account of my daily prayers and good deeds! lo, here is a life in the main exact and spotless, and squared by the rule of thy commandments!' his answer to us, one and all, is, "Send for Peter, search the Scriptures," listen to those who proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to thee in my name, give up the thoughts, give up the pride of thy heart, let *me* save thee.

There is another particular worthy of observation in this history of Cornelius, which is, God's stated method of helping us, and bringing us to the knowledge of the truth. As it is in the natural world, so it is in spiritual things, and in the great affair of our conversion; God works in the use of means, and does not ordinarily work

without them. As he has put things into a constant, regular course to supply our bodily wants, gives bread to the sower, and feeds man in the way of his own labour, though he could do it immediately, and without the use of any such means; so he acts with regard to our souls, not speaking to us directly from heaven, but making use of men as his instruments; insomuch that one man's salvation depends greatly upon the instruction, advice, persuasion, and example of another, and sometimes almost upon a word speaking from a weak creature like ourselves. So when Jesus had appeared to Paul, and could as easily have finished his conversion as he began it, he left him to the ministry and teaching of Ananias, Acts, ix. So when the eunuch was to be converted, the angel of the Lord sent Philip to open the Scriptures, and preach Jesus to him, Acts, viii. And so here in the case of Cornelius, though God in a wonderful manner prepares the way for his salvation by the knowledge of Christ, first appearing to him, and then to Peter in order to it, yet the words whereby he and his house were to be saved, must come from Peter's mouth. And God still proceeds in the same method, sending and calling to man by man, as he does this day to you by me. For though the work of conversion is his, and he gives the increase, though Christ must be with his ministers alway, even to the end of the world, to bless and prosper their endeavours, yet if they do not plant and water, no effect will follow in the ordinary course of things. God grant I may speak the mystery of Christ boldly as I ought to speak, and that I may not always speak to you in vain! I beseech you even now in his name, be ye reconciled to him. Nay, my brethren, I have spoken, and, with his help, will speak to you the words of eternal life. Only have pity on your own souls; see in this your day the thing swhich belong to your

everlasting peace. Say not in the bottom of your hearts, What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth, calling us to take up our cross and follow thee? art thou come to torment us? Let it not be said that you hate knowledge, and do not choose the fear of the Lord, lest that dreadful sentence overtake you, "as for those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me." Consider with yourselves, what would you have thought of Cornelius, if he had slighted Peter's message when he came to him? If it had been left upon record that he turned a deaf ear to the heavenly instruction that was brought him, would you not have thought him a very stupid, inconsiderate person, fatally blind to his own interest, unthankful to God, and utterly unworthy of the least degree of mercy from him? And what better are we, if we always resist the Holy Ghost, harden our hearts in unbelief, and continue unconverted under the word of life, by the appointment and grace of God ministered unto us? For God still sends his messengers and ambassadors upon the same errand of converting and saving men, and is still ready to accompany it with his power, and has the same will to make it as effectual to their salvation, as it was to Cornelius. But what I would observe farther to you upon this head is, that though the ministers of the Gospel are chiefly appointed to the work, and watch for your souls as they that must give account, and upon the peril of *their* souls must keep back nothing that is profitable for you, yet they are not the only persons who are capable of acting in God's stead, and authorized to do it. It is in the power of all others to help every man his brother, by speaking a word in season; and their duty to do it, as God gives them ability; and they will do it, if they have a lively sense of God's mercies in Christ upon their own minds, and of the

dangerous condition of those who are still in the darkness of their heathen state, and who, though in words they profess Christ, yet deny him in their works, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. And what is here said more especially concerns masters and mistresses of families, who are certainly as much bound to take care of the souls as the bodies of all that belong to them; whose authority would greatly enforce whatever they do of this kind in God's name, and their words no doubt, in many instances, be blessed to the spiritual, everlasting advantage of their children and servants, and of husband and wife to each other. The seed may perish; but if it is not sown, we are sure it will never grow. God waits for and waits upon man's endeavours in this as he does in other cases, and does not work without them. Therefore, if thou wouldst be a Christian, speak, and hold not thy peace, and know that God is with thee to help thee. Own him in thy family by prayer, and Scripture reading, and let all about thee see that thou art more concerned for their and thine own *eternal*, than temporal welfare. If thy words fall to the ground, thou hast delivered thy own soul, but thou canst not be entitled to the blessing of faithful Abraham, if like him thou dost not command thy children and thy household after thee, to keep the way of the Lord. Gen. xviii. 19.

Having thus opened the history of Cornelius, and made such observations upon it as I thought worthy of your consideration; I shall another time, with God's help, set before you the words whereby he and his house were saved. The Lord prepare you for it. Read them Acts, x. Come prepared to the ministry of the word; receive it with meekness, with full submission to it, and earnest desire to profit by it; that so the Holy Ghost, whose coming to quicken a world dead in trespasses and

sins, and make ready a people prepared for the Lord, by faith in Christ, and faithful subjection to him, we this day commemorate, may take possession of your souls and bodies, and seal them to the great day of redemption; that by the same spirit we may all rise from our graves with God's mark in our foreheads, and enter into the joy of our Lord.

"God, who as at this time didst teach the hearts," &c.

Well, brethren; salvation is the errand upon which Peter is sent, and which Cornelius was beforehand prepared to receive. We may well suppose that the interval betwixt the angel's appearing and Peter's coming to him was an awful, dreadful point of time with him, and could not pass without deep reflection and many a troubled thought. It is probable he thought himself in a good way before, and had never entertained the least doubt concerning his state. And yet he is plainly given to understand that he had every thing to learn, and that God's truth was not yet come to him. He would naturally think with himself, I can have no doubt of the heavenly vision; I saw it evidently; and if what I am told in it is true, I am this moment in a most dangerous condition, and must perish if I die before the saving words are brought to me. Oh, with what concern, and trembling expectation, would this serious man wait for the hour of Peter's arrival! Who would not have wished to see with what eager transport he would run to meet and receive him; and especially, who would not have been present in that little assembly to hear the words of life; who would not but have heard St. Peter preach! He to whom Christ himself gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven—a perfect understanding of the way in which men should be admitted into it, and authority to declare it; he who was an eye-witness of the majesty of Christ, when there

came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" he who was particularly commanded, when he was converted, to strengthen his brethren; he who had denied his Master with oaths and curses, but nevertheless obtained mercy, and therefore could speak of the pardoning love of God to others with more boldness and assurance; how desirable must it have been to hear *him* making known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and receive the words of grace and salvation from *his* lips! And if nothing of his had been left upon record for the information and comfort of believers in all future ages, how should we have lamented the loss, and thought ourselves unhappy in being deprived of the instructions of so eminent an apostle! Why, blessed be God, here are the words he spoke upon this great, interesting occasion; here is the very sermon, amongst others, which he preached to Cornelius when he opened the kingdom of heaven to him, and in him to the whole body of the Gentiles. And the words of it are as powerful now in God's hands as they were then; the Holy Ghost is still ready to accompany it; and it would as certainly be blessed to your conversion and establishment in the faith, as it was to his, if you could but say with him, "Now therefore are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God;" x. 33. Let us attend; with this belief, that to us is the word of this salvation sent, and that God now commands our attention to it.

Chap. x. 34, 35. "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"—accepted, not *for* his own righteousness; for that Cornelius could not be, as I have before showed at large, but *to* God's; to a

righteousness of his appointing, which he freely bestows, and *can* accept; to a new and holy state of grace, pardon, and the hope of eternal life in and through a Mediator. "For not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saves us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he sheds on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;" Tit. iii. 5, 6. And his meaning is exactly agreeable to, and well explained by these words of St. Paul, "Is he the God of the Jews only, is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also;" Rom. iii. 29. So that they "who sometimes were far off, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (made to the Jews), "are made nigh by the blood of Christ." And to this sense St. Peter explains himself; for thus he goes on:

Ver. 36. "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)"—the word which God sent unto the children of Israel, and which Peter was now sent to preach to the Gentiles, you see, is peace with God by Jesus Christ—for that he is "appointed heir of all things," Heb. i. 2.—"hath all power given him in heaven and earth," Matt. xxviii. 18, to govern, bless, and save mankind; all who come unto God by him, receive him into their hearts by faith, submit to his laws, and take him for their Lord and King to reign over them. So that, let them be what they will in other respects, if they refuse this, there is no other possible way of justification for them.

Ver. 37, 38. "That word, I say, you know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power; who went about doing good, and heal-

ing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him"—that there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth—that salvation had been already first offered to all the people of the Jews in his name, according to the will of God—that John Baptist had prepared them for it, by preaching the doctrine of repentance—and that he had made full proof of his being sent of God, to destroy the devil's power and kingdom, and cast him out of the possession he had gotten in the souls and bodies of men—these things, St. Peter tells them, they could not but know. But, alas! as yet they knew them at best only by hearsay, as too many do now; and Christ must be known by them in another manner, by a true faith in him and hearty acceptance of salvation by him, from an inward sense of their want of him, before he could be a Saviour to them. And this they did, by that time St. Peter had spoken a few plain words more; "for," says he, ver. 39—43. "We are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

So that the sum of St. Peter's preaching upon this occasion was to this effect—That man wants peace with God, and that Christ is the Peace-maker—That we obtain remission of sins, and reconciliation with God, through his name, and for his sake only, and by faith in his precious blood-shedding—That John Baptist must first be the preacher of repentance to us, or that there

is no way of coming at so great a benefit, and applying Christ by faith to ourselves for salvation, but by a knowledge of our sinful state, a hatred of all sin, and a will to forsake it; for that he who is our Saviour, is also ordained to be our Judge, and can be the Author of eternal life only to them that obey him, and are so wrought upon by his goodness, as to make suitable returns of love to him, by doing whatsoever he commands them.

Such are the words by which Cornelius and all his house were to be saved, and *were* saved. The Lord opened their hearts, and they received them gladly. For while Peter yet spake, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word, ver. 44; i. e. the Holy Ghost fell on them in miraculous powers and effects, as he did upon the apostles at the day of Pentecost, such as speaking with tongues, and magnifying or praising God by inspiration. And this was done to show that God was now returned to the Gentiles, and was an evident, solemn declaration of his gracious purpose to take them for his people in common with the Jews, and make them fit for himself, by taking possession of them by his Spirit. Not that they were therefore saved, or secured from all possibility of ever falling away, because they had these extraordinary gifts conferred upon them; for Christ tells us that many should prophesy, and cast out devils in his name, and yet be rejected, as being workers of iniquity, and unrenewed in the depth of their hearts. But these gifts were necessary at that time for the conversion of others; and they were moreover an earnest and a token to all, that God would dwell in them by his Spirit, which should guide them into all truth, confirm them in the faith, and make them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, if they faithfully adhered to him, by prizing and seeking after his graces, and endeavouring

to perfect holiness in the fear of God. For the preaching of Peter was the savour of life to them only by the secret operation of the Spirit upon their hearts. In this way he was the Author and Giver of life, and an inward witness to them; i. e. by their effectual calling and conversion, and faithfulness unto death. So he is to all, to the end of the world, who desire his coming and presence in their souls, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, in his perpetual and best office in the church; making the words of Christ, his apostles and ministers, saving words to us, by enlightening our understandings, sanctifying our affections, converting our wills, working faith in us, and inclining us to obey from the heart that form of sound doctrine which is delivered us.

These blessed words of truth and peace, of grace and mercy, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, of redemption and salvation, how have they been received by you? And does conscience bear you witness in the Holy Ghost, that you rest your souls upon them, frame your lives according to them, seek your best comfort from them, and make them the foundation of all your hopes? Has the Lord proved and visited your hearts with them, bringing you in repentance and humility before his mercy-seat for grace to help in time of need, raising you to a cheerful trust and confidence in him for the remission of your sins, and acceptance through Christ, and confirming you in the obedience of faith? Or do they carry a dead sound with them, finding no admittance, raising no hope, giving no comfort; or if they are heard with joy at the first, and gain our approbation and consent in some degree for a time, yet working no real conversion, producing no lasting effect? Or, what is worst of all, do we make the glad tidings of mercy by the Gospel to a perishing world a pretence for continuing in sin, and hardening ourselves

against the love and fear of God; and so turning it into poison and a snare to our souls, and utterly defeating his whole purpose in offering it to us?

I say, what think you of Christ, and his Gospel of peace, in the remission of sins? Are you endued with this leading, necessary point of knowledge, that you are sinful creatures, in a state of great disorder, weakness, and corruption, alienated from the God that made you in your wills, desires, and affections, apt to forget, prone to disobey him, and that this is a state of misery and condemnation, and you must be undone without help from the Lord? Do you know indeed, and find within yourselves, that the help he offers you by Jesus Christ is such as you want, and exactly suited to the case of sinners; and have you a will to receive, and a desire to improve it, to your present comfort, and everlasting advantage? What an awakening, full proof have we here, in the case of Cornelius, of the necessity of Christ for every soul of man; and that there is no acceptance with God, no kind of life will stand us in any stead, without being accepted to an interest in the Saviour! Christ himself hath spoken the word, and it must stand for ever against all the thoughts and imaginations of our hearts: "No man cometh to the Father but by me," John, xiv. 16; i. e. to God's covenant of peace and forgiveness here, or glory hereafter, but by being washed from his sins in the blood of Christ, made partaker of his righteousness, and quickened to newness of life by his Spirit. Every man in the world lies under a sentence of death, and has a body of sin to be freed from; the guilt of it must be taken away, and the power of it subdued in him. He cannot deliver himself, he cannot conquer death, atone for his transgressions, or make himself a new heart and a new spirit; and, therefore, if ever he is saved, he must fly to the mercy of God as a sinner, accept of deliverance from him in the way of his appointing for all men, and receive this saying of St. Peter, "To him

give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Not be rewarded for his own righteousness, or the merit of his good deeds; he must let that alone for ever; that is no plea for condemned, sinful man. Alas! what do we think of; where are those good deeds of ours which must make Christ of no effect; what are they in the best of men, when they are tried by the line and the plummet, and laid to the straight rule of God's commandments? No; but thy salvation, O man, is by the grace of forgiveness, and that forgiveness clearly purchased for thee by the Son of God, suffering the wrath of God in thy stead, and for thee, a sinner, without which thou must have suffered the penalty of thy sins for ever in hell. When thou art established in the sense and belief of this great goodness of thy God towards thee, and of the strangeness of thy deliverance, by mercy far beyond what thou couldst ever think of, then, and not before, thou mayest be a faithful, sincere man, and set thyself to please God, in all holy obedience; then thou mayest say in thy heart, What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits, and how shall I ever love Christ enough for the great love wherewith he loved me?—and what thou dost in this disposition, and from a root of true faith, will be an acceptable service. But yet it must not, cannot be the ground of thy acceptance to the reward of eternal life. Christ is that foundation, and if thou layest any other, it will be at the peril of thy soul. Still thou must be a pardoned man in every thing, in thy best as well as worst estate, from one end of thy life to the other; and if ever thou hast true comfort in thyself, and good hope towards God, it must be through grace. Take especial notice, therefore, that the words by which Cornelius and his house were saved, are the same by which all others must be saved; I mean, by the Holy Ghost working with them, and setting them home upon our hearts. St. Peter knew of no other

method of salvation than remission of sins by Jesus Christ, in order to a covenant state of holiness, and newness of nature, by the power of the Holy Spirit; and if we may judge from his other sermons, this was the burden of all his preaching. In one, and that the first Christian sermon that ever was preached after the descent of the Holy Ghost, he says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost;" Acts, ii. 38. In another, "Repent ye, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, that so the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;" iii. 19. In a third, "there is salvation in no other;" iv. 12. In a fourth, "Him hath God exalted to his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins;" v. 31. So that these words, "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," you see, did not drop from St. Peter's mouth as it were by chance, but came from his heart, where they had been deeply imprinted by the finger of God. It was the very word which God sent, and sent him and the other apostles to preach every where, and which they all sealed with their blood. Peace by Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, possessor of his saints by gift from God, and of heaven for them by purchase, was the heart of God opened to man, all his wisdom could contrive, and all his love could do, for our salvation from that unhappy state of blindness, corruption, and enmity against him, we were fallen into. And it is much to be observed, and what we should greatly lay to heart in this our day, that the goodness of God can go no farther; here almighty love is at an end with us; there remaineth no more, or other, sacrifice for sin; if it is unpurged by faith in the blood of atonement, we must lie under the burden of it for ever. He who is appointed to be the

Judge of quick and dead, and will one day separate the precious from the vile, as he ordered his disciples to shake off the very dust of their feet for a testimony against those who would not receive his Gospel of peace, in token of their desperate hardness, and utter rejection, so he cannot deny himself, but will infallibly make good his words in their eternal condemnation. Oh! why will we not accept of life and peace from God, and show that we do so by our love of Christ, and faithfulness in his service? Why do we not consider, and understand more what the Lord has done, and will do for us? Where are the earnest, daily prayers for deliverance, and to be kept safe to his heavenly kingdom? Why do we slight so many opportunities of sealing with God, and assuring to ourselves the benefits of Christ's death and passion, in the most comfortable sacrament of his body and blood? Where is that sense of our natural misery and undone state, which would make every one of us say, "If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole?" For these are the things, these are the inward workings and outward expressions of them, which must prove our Christianity to ourselves and others; and thus it is that "the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God;" Rom. viii. 16. Baptism, church-going, or an outward form only of any kind, is nothing, and worse than nothing, if Christ is not working at the root of our profession; as it shuts us up in blindness and self-deceit, and hinders our closing with him for salvation. To see and acknowledge our corruption, weakness, and condemnation in sin, is the first step towards our recovery; to come to Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, and venture our souls upon him by faith, gives us a right to all the blessings he has purchased for us; and if we have happily got over these two steps in our Christian course, our next care will be to walk worthy of the Lord unto all

well-pleasing, adorn the doctrine of Jesus Christ by a suitable, holy life, and "let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." Here is a man in whom the Spirit dwells, and Christ reigns. The words whereby we must be saved are indeed become saving words to him; God has brought them home to his heart, and they are turned into the nourishment of his soul; and unless the truth and promise of God can fail, every thing shall work together for his good. The remainder of sin in him will find daily work for his repentance and prayers; but his faith tells him that he has an Advocate with the Father, and such a righteousness from Christ as he may boldly plead before God. Let me speak this to thee, and do thou speak it to thyself, O fearful, doubting Christian! Others boldly venture all upon mercy, though they are not qualified for it, and without renouncing their sins, or desiring a change of their wills and affections. But if thou art grieved and wearied with the burden of thy sins, and willing to be a new creature, question not one of the promises, nor thy interest in them. When thou hearest words from God whereby thou mayest be saved, do not dishonour him so much, nor be such an enemy to thy own peace, as to think he does not mean what he says; but firmly believe that there is unspeakable grace, almighty love, and everlasting truth, in those words, and that, with his help, they will assuredly save *thee*. Think with thyself, that so long as thou art in this heartless, doubting frame, thou art hindered by it from going on to perfection, and that the love of God cannot have its effect upon thee in bringing thee to a cheerful obedience. Let the sense of thy unworthiness always keep thee humble, but let nothing daunt thee; the mercy of God, and the blood of Christ, is above all thy sins.

On the other hand, let none of us presume upon the

mercy of God, or take it to ourselves in a wicked or a careless way. For his threatenings are as plain and as true as his promises; and "if we live after the flesh," having our hearts upon the world, thinking we believe when we have no knowledge or belief of our sinful state or dread of sin, without any other goodness than nature can help us to, and unrenewed by the Holy Ghost, "we shall die" eternally. The mercy of God in the forgiveness of our sins gives us all the encouragement we can desire, and is a sacred bond upon us to forsake them; and was proclaimed to the world for this very end, "that we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives." But our faith is vain, and our religion good for nothing, if it does not mortify sin, and increase the love of God in us.

God grant we may know the Saviour according to the tenour of these words of St. Peter; that as he went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, so he may heal all the distempers of our souls; that upon the call of John Baptist to repentance, we may see and hate those sins of ours which slew and hanged him on the tree; that we may say that Jesus is the Lord by the Holy Ghost, by whom only we can say it, and gladly believe in him for the remission of all our sins, present peace, and final acceptance with God; and that in this belief we may live to him, for the great love wherewith he loved us, and behave so worthily under him, as to meet him with joy at his second coming to judge the quick and dead. May the good Spirit take possession of us, and seal us to that blessed time, that Christ may present us to the Father washed in his blood; and that we may for ever ascribe all honour, praise, and thanksgiving to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three persons, distinct in themselves, and having distinct offices in the salvation of man, but one God blessed for evermore!

SERMON XXI.

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,
As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:
If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious, 1 Peter, ii. 1—3.

St. Peter, in the foregoing chapter, having spoken of the glory of Christ, of faith in the sprinkling of his blood, of the hope of believers by his resurrection from the dead, and poured out his sense of the great blessings they were received to, from the fulness of a joyful heart; proceeds in the next place to show what they were to build upon this foundation, and what obligations they were under from the mercy of God in Christ to improve it to newness of life, unfeigned love, and pure obedience.

"Wherefore," i. e. seeing you have been begotten again by the word of life which has been preached to you, born of incorruptible seed, and made the children of God by adoption and grace; remember that you are now to live suitably to such a high and happy state, and be careful above all things to preserve it; and to this end, "laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings, as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

The words are very instructive, and contain a great deal in a small compass, easily remembered, and not difficult to be understood. And I observe this to convince you, if it pleases God, how poor a covering it is for your ignorance and unbelief which you are so apt to fly to, of want of time or learning to know much of Scrip-

ture. The whole faith and duty of a Christian are many times comprised in few words, not to encourage sloth and idleness in any, or prevent our diligent reading and studying of all Scripture; but for the benefit and comfort of all, and to take away all excuses from the busiest and most unlearned part of mankind: seeing that the knowledge of salvation may be easily attained, carried about in memory, and laid up in our hearts. The words I have now read to you are an instance of this, amongst many others; and I pray God make you sensible of it, teach where I cannot, and imprint them in the depth of your souls. There are three particulars in the text which, with God's help, I shall open to you in the order they are mentioned.

I. St. Peter's exhortation to "lay aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings."

II. "As new-born babes to desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby."

III. The motive or reason for so doing, contained in the words, "if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

I. We are exhorted to "lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings." Would ye be Christians indeed, the disciples of Jesus, to receive a law at his mouth, to follow his example, to live unto God by him? Look well at these words of St. Peter. Here is the rule you must walk by, and the mark you are to be aiming at. The evil tempers of your fallen nature must be seen and resisted. The graceless passions of the old man must come under the discipline of the law of Christ, to be restrained and subdued. It must be a weighty matter upon your minds, a first principle never

to be disputed, a point of which you are clearly convinced, and fully settled in once for all, that as the children of faith, and heirs of the grace of God, you must lay aside, check, and mortify, with the utmost sincerity of endeavour, as much as lieth in you, and as God shall enable you, all *malice* — in general, all manner of wickedness, and particularly that evil quality, so inconsistent with a Christian state of love, so destructive of your own peace, and so mischievous to others, of bearing malice or ill-will in case of injury, or on any account whatsoever, to any soul of man.

"And all guile and hypocrisies:" all fraud and dissimulation; never purposing to deceive, never speaking what you do not think, never doing what you would be ashamed of if it was known; but acting steadily in all cases by the rule of conscience, and with the same clearness, simplicity, and uprightness of intention, as if you had a window in your breast for all your thoughts and designs to be seen by all the world, and knowing that you are always naked and open to the eye of God. "And envies;" neither grudging at another man's lot, nor repining at your own; but rejoicing in his prosperity, and taking what God gives you as an alms, with thankfulness, and cheerful submission to the will of his providence. Here is a word more, and that is, "evil-speakings;" the tongue never to be governed, till we have learned to govern ourselves by the fear of God, and the love of our neighbours; which, in spite of all the pretensions we can make to religion, peaceableness, and good-will, in spite of all pretences to the contrary, betrays the evil disposition of the heart; the tongue, that unruly member, must be kept in subjection, and all evil-speakings laid aside. And for the same reason, all evil-hearing too; I mean, that we must neither speak evil of any man ourselves, nor take a secret pleasure in hearing his cha-

racter slandered by others; for both proceed from the same root of pride, self-ignorance, and uncharitableness. Indeed, my brethren, all this is strict. Some can make a tolerable shift, from natural conscience, worldly prudence, or sense of reputation, to keep themselves clear of outward scandalous sins; but St. Peter will not be content with this; he is here teaching us to judge ourselves by another rule, and carrying every man into the depth of his heart. I say, you may observe, that he is here prescribing a law to our inward parts; and striking at those evil qualities in us, which, though they do not much prejudice our reputation, or worldly interest, are nevertheless odious in the sight of God, full proof of our corruption, and eating like a canker at the root of our happiness. You may not be an adulterer, nor a drunkard, nor a profane swearer, nor a sabbath-breaker, nor a thief; but if you are under the power of malice and envy, deceitful and insincere, and destitute of that pure love, which by ruling in your heart would set a guard upon your mouth, and keep the door of your lips, you are not in the way of peace and holiness; you are not in a Christian state; you are "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity;" Acts, viii. 23. i. e. if you are not convinced of the evil of these tempers, nor striving against them. This is the work we must be doing in obedience to God, and with full persuasion of the necessity of it. For *he* it is who says, by the mouth of St. Peter, "lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings;" do not think it enough to "make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, and justify yourselves before men," Luke, xi. 39, and xvi. 15. but if you would come to the true knowledge of yourselves, and form a right judgment of your state, look where God does; look at the heart; see what passes there, whether the evil motions of it have been discovered

and brought before God in repentance, and whether you are watching and praying against them. I beseech you take notice of what I am saying; and observe the difference between any kind of outward behaviour and an inward spiritual work of reformation. One has nothing of God in it, and while it is rested in will keep you from Christ; the other begins with God, leads to faith, and is a true work upon that ground, with regard to every sin, open or secret. It is true, where there is nothing in the outward behaviour contrary to the rule of the Gospel, we are obliged in charity to think and hope the best; but if you look no farther for yourselves, you are undone. There is a world of iniquity in the heart, well known to God; and if it never was searched in his presence, by the light of his word shining upon the conscience, you never truly repented, never knew how much you have to be forgiven, never came sincerely to Christ for it, never applied your endeavours in the right place, by laying the axe to the root of the tree. What is the reason that so many talk of their good hearts? It is because they are utter strangers to them, and in all their lives never passed one half hour in their company. What is the reason that they are, even to themselves, as graves which appear not, outwardly fair, and carrying a handsome inscription in their foreheads, within full of stench and corruption; but because they never smelt into their own bosoms? Why do they know so little of Christ, prize him so little, and think so meanly of their obligations to him, but because they never were pinched with a sense of their poverty and nakedness, and do not go to the bottom of their case? And what can this wretched ignorance, and shuffling with their duty, proceed from, but judging of themselves by an imperfect rule; and if they can but fashion their outward man to some kind of conformity to it, making no account of those sins which the apostle

here brings to our view, taking no care to purge themselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, nor casting their eyes with any degree of concern upon that inward defilement which has overspread their souls like a leprosy? And on the other hand, what is the reason, why those who are in earnest with God and their souls, the awakened and converted, confess and lament their sins, without guile or hypocrisy, but because they know them, and go with the Spirit into the depth of their hearts? And therefore, knowing what a body of death they carry about with them, dare not stir an inch from Christ in their very best estate; but keep close to him for pardon and strength to fight against all inward corruption, as well as outward sin; laying hold on mercy, and at the same time endeavouring faithfully, in the sense of it, to approve themselves to that God, to whom "all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid."

Let this then be the instruction and advice of the first head: you must not deny, excuse, or extenuate the prevalence which these and other secret sins have in you; while you do, you are hidden from yourselves, without Christ, and strangers to a work of grace. And when you do know them by help from above, it is your business, as Christians, to resolve and endeavour to lay them aside; "all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings." The help we are to make use of for this purpose, the way and means of attaining to so desirable an end, will appear under the second head;

II. Which is St. Peter's exhortation to all, "as new-born babes to desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby."

Sincere, as coming from God; every way fitted to maintain the new life he gives, to preserve the soul in

health and vigour, and feed us for eternity; pure without the mixture of any ill quality, and not like mother's milk, which many times has the seeds of disease in it, and conveys ill humours as well as nourishment, and at the best can only feed us for a dying life, which must soon have an end. But the living, or life-giving word of God, the apostle tells us in the foregoing chapter, "endureth for ever;" he means in its effects, and as being the instrument of that new birth by which we are made alive unto God, and can no more die than Christ himself, whose life in us it is, when we are grafted into him by faith, and become members of his body. That word, he adds, "which by the Gospel is preached unto you;" which brings you the glad tidings of peace with God, deliverance from the curse of sin, restoration from death and hell, and is your guide and sure title to the joys of heaven. *Desire* it, says he, let the will of your souls be to it, hunger and thirst after it, take it, feed upon it daily, "desire it as new-born babes." Oh! this is saying a great deal. You know that new-born babes have but one appetite, one single desire for their food, cry for it, can be pleased and satisfied with nothing else, do what you will to them, and must perish without it. Even so, says the blessed apostle, with the same eagerness, singleness, and purity of intention, "desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby," as you certainly will, if your desire is purely to it; to know what God has therein revealed for your benefit and great comfort, what he has done for you, and what you must do for yourselves to follow its directions, to take it into your hearts, to be made wise unto salvation, and nourished by it to eternal life. Let me tell you briefly what you will find in it; the entrance of sin and death into the world; the earth cursed, and heaven lost; the cause of what you would otherwise have been ignorant of, why the body is liable to pain,

sickness, and death; why the soul, made at first after the image of God, is now poisoned to the very root, dark in all its faculties, turned from God, as weak as it is corrupt, and dead in trespasses and sins. Behold the depth of your fall in Adam. But if you give way to this knowledge of yourselves, and are willing to understand the truth of your case, as it is declared in Scripture, behold, in the next place, what hope it has for you, and what mercy and deliverance it brings you from God. There you will see the light of heaven rising upon a dark world; the Son of God descending with a message of grace and reconciliation, and working our redemption by himself; taking our nature upon him, that in it, and for it, he might fulfil all righteousness; make satisfaction to justice, pay the debt of our sin by his own sufferings and death, discharge us from condemnation, and restore us to the favour of God, and the hope of eternal life. I mention only these two points, our fall and death in Adam, and recovery by Jesus Christ, because they are the principal, by far the most concerning, the sum and substance of Scripture. All others are only subordinate to these, and chiefly intended to illustrate and guide us to them. With this light in your hands, you will see clearly every step of your way; without it, you will find nothing else in the Scripture. And one of these is likewise in order to the other; that knowing your death and condemnation in sin, you may fly in the peril of your souls to Christ, the salvation of Israel, the light of the Gentiles, the mercy of God to a lost world, and the hope of all the ends of the earth. This is that blessed word of redemption, which is the glory of all Scripture, and runs through it as a golden thread, which was preached to our first parents in that original promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," Gen. iii. 15; and delivered by them to their posterity, as the sole ground of their trust and hope towards God;

which was renewed and confirmed to Abraham and David; spoken of by all the prophets; and fulfilled in the coming and person of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is that word, which on the day of Pentecost converted three thousand souls, has since brought many millions to God, and is as powerful as ever in the Spirit's hands to "open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ;" Acts, xxvi. 18. This is that word, which by the mercy of God is sent, and now preached to you, written and put into your hands, "that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ," the only Saviour of sinners, "and that believing you might have life through his name;" John, xx. 31. This is that sincere, nourishing, wholesome word, which St. Peter exhorts you to desire, as infants do their milk; to study it diligently, to attend upon the preaching of it, to endeavour as God shall enable you to understand every thing belonging to it, leading to it, or flowing from it, its doctrines, its promises, its commands, to the end you may grow thereby. As I said before, you will, if you desire and use it for this end. It will be an infallible means of your "growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;" 2 Pet. iii. 18. Not so much by any virtue or power of its own, or by our own endeavours working with it, as by the grace of the same Spirit which gave it, and always speaks in and with it, to every sincerely desiring soul. You know it is one of its peculiar doctrines and great excellencies, that it sends us to him, as the Author and Giver of life, by whom we shall be helped effectually, to the utmost of our wants and desires; and by whom alone we can believe to the saving of the soul, and walk worthy of our high and holy calling.

These words of St. Peter, now brought to your remem-

brance, and briefly opened by me, may by the blessing of God be a means of begetting or increasing an earnest pure desire for the sincere milk of the word. But I must say something more upon the occasion; and may the Spirit of all grace help you to apply it! Here then is your test; and by this you may prove yourselves, whether you are in the faith or not, Christians, or unbelievers. If "you sincerely desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby;" if you come to it with delight and appetite, as to the food of your souls, provided of God, to improve in saving knowledge, to be confirmed in the truth, to know God, to know Christ, to know yourselves, to know sin more and more, to receive whatever it teaches, relating either to faith or practice, with the simplicity of little children, and to be kept in the way of salvation; you have an assured comfortable proof within yourselves of a Christian state, and that a work of grace is begun and carrying on in you. For a formalist can do nothing of this. He may come to hear the word preached; he may take up the Bible, and read a portion of it, even daily, supposing it to be a duty, and because his conscience will not let him be easy in the neglect of it; but he does not desire it as a child does the breast, for growth and nourishment in faith and holiness. He has no such thought or intention; and especially no prayer accompanying it, to have what he reads opened to his understanding, and set home upon his heart. St. James says, "He is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was;" James, i. 23, 24. What then are you doing, and what is your hope as Christians, when you seldom or never read the word of God, and find in yourselves no manner of desire to be acquainted with its sacred contents, no appetite or relish for the heavenly

food it sets before you? Verily the case is plain; you are not believers, you are not in Christ, you are nothing but baptized heathens. Do what else you will, if you are never so civil, sober and prudent, if you come constantly to church and sacraments, whatever you are in your own opinion, or in the esteem of the world; if you do not study and love the Bible, here is full proof against you, that you are not in the way of salvation. Your souls lost, and redeemed; God pitying you in your sad condition of sin and misery; Christ following you into the wilderness; the Holy Spirit quickening you; peace in life, and comfort in death, heaven or hell your everlasting portion, as you refuse or embrace the mercy offered you: are these the weighty matters which the word of God brings to your knowledge, and do you slight it, prefer an idle tale or a song-book to it, saunter away your vacant hours, and especially your Sabbaths, without looking upon it, and as it were trample this pearl under your feet? Was it written on purpose that you might know the love of God and of Christ, and learn how to secure so great a benefit to yourselves; and do you live in woful ignorance of it, and value none of its instructions? My brethren, what can you say to this? And what plainer proof can be given of your being this day and hour in darkness and unbelief? I beseech you, consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding. And if it pleases God, that you should take up a resolution to be more diligent for the time to come, in reading, hearing, and studying the word of life, do not think this is all you have to do to bring yourselves into a better state; but read it, and pray over it, to the end it may bring you to Christ for peace with God, and the pardon of all your sins. For so, and not otherwise, you will comply with St. Peter's exhortation in both its parts; "To lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and

envies, and evil-speakings; and as new-born babes to desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

III. Which brings me to consider the reason for so doing, or the only ground on which it can be done, contained in these words, "if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." O! that *if!* it is a little word, but has a great weight hanging upon it. "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious"—if you have any sense or understanding of the grace of Christ, of the great deliverance which has been wrought for you, and of the happy change in your condition, any real belief of it, any value for it, any desire to keep it, you must, you will consider and lay to heart what return is required of you for so inestimable a benefit. You will think it the strongest of all arguments for doing what you are here called upon to do. You will endeavour, as much as possible, "to lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil-speakings." You will avoid and renounce them, as the bane of your hopes, and utterly inconsistent with your new state. You will now give yourselves up to God, to be renewed to his image in righteousness and true holiness; and you will also, "as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." You will receive it as the proper food of your new life, with many thanksgivings to God, for giving and appointing it for that purpose, and working with you in the use of it; and you will no more expect that your souls should thrive and be in health without it, than that your bodies should without suitable nourishment. But what is it to *taste* that the Lord is gracious? Certainly it can mean nothing less than a real, unfeigned, heartfelt sense of his grace and goodness, in delivering us from the misery of our condition in sin by dying for us, and recovering us to a state of favour with God, as well-beloved

children, and to the promise of an eternal inheritance in heaven, together with a belief and persuasion of our own interest in all he has done and suffered for us; we having come in upon his call, taken our vow in baptism upon ourselves, given up our names to Christ, and trusting only in his meritorious blood-shedding and all-sufficient righteousness, for the pardon of our sins and eternal justification. And this, in all who are sincere with God, and believe to the saving of the soul, is accompanied with a farther taste and experience of the Lord as gracious to them, in bringing their wills over to his obedience, and inclining them very highly to esteem that other part of God's covenant in him, and receive it as another precious gift from him, that he will "put his laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." Read the whole of it in Heb. viii. And if your hearts can bear witness to the grace and truth of it, and you find in yourselves a desire and will to live to God according to it, you may be sure that he has been working in you, to raise you out of your dead state, and that you are of the number of those, who "have tasted that the Lord is gracious." On the other hand, it is evident at once, that those who never were convinced of sin, the accursed nature of it, and their own danger in it, can have no such taste. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing to them; they value it not, they believe it not, whatever they pretend; they are yet in their sins, without God and without Christ; they are not the persons here spoken to. They know they do not desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. And as to "laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings," they could as soon make a world. For without faith there can be no obedience, or at the best only an outward show of it; but no working with the Spirit in the heart, no sincerity with

God, no will to choose him for our portion, no settled purpose of living to his service, nor prayer to be "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God;" Phil. i. 11. But if you so believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as to come unto God by him, to look for the pardon of your sins through him, to venture all your hopes upon him, and sincerely purpose to walk with him as all his disciples do, in the way of his holy commandments, whether your faith be weak or strong, in a higher or lower degree, you can say you have "tasted that the Lord is gracious:" a great work has been wrought in you, and the Spirit has "opened your hearts to attend to the things which have been spoken" to you in the name of the Lord, for your present comfort and everlasting salvation. You are upon the one right ground — the Gospel foundation of a pure obedience in love and freedom of spirit; and can perceive a marvellous force of reasoning, a sweet attractive and powerful call to sincerity with God in the inner man in these words, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." If your faith is weak, yet do not deny what God has done for you. Let not any man, let not your own fears, prevail with you to question the reality of it; but be thankful for it, as you well may, put it in exercise, and pray to the Lord to increase it. The man who said, "Lord, help mine unbelief," could say at the same time, that *he did believe*, was treated by Christ as a believer, and had his request. Mark, ix. 24. You want more joy, more assurance of faith; your desire is good; and that very desire is a stronger proof of the truth of your faith, than you are willing to think it. And if you would but make use of it, and proceed to build upon it, and encourage yourself in the Lord, and patiently wait his time for greater manifestations of his peace, the hope you have will assuredly support and carry you on in the work you

have to do. Whereas, by always doubting of your faith, and concluding against yourself that God has given you nothing, because he has given more to others, you will be heartless in his service, think your time for working with him is not yet come, and sadly hinder your progress. St. John has an engaging comfortable word for those whom he calls little children, and says, "he writes to them because their sins are forgiven them for his name's sake, and because they have known the Father," in his grace and love, and as a reconciled Father in Christ; 1 John, ii. 12, 13. Call upon your hearts to answer and say, "Abba Father," as you believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God, and in him are received to the adoption of sons; to the end you may keep yourselves in the love of God, and show whose children you are, "by laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings, and as new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." If you are strong in faith, and find yourselves refreshed with abundance of peace, prove it to yourselves, prove it to all about you, by its fruits. You know the glory of it belongs to God, and that he expects you should "show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light, by being the salt of the earth, and shining as lights in the world;" 1 Pet. ii. 9. Matt. v. 13, 14. As you have tasted the sweetness of Christ, you will long for more of it; and desire nothing so much as to be confirmed in his love, and show your love to him in the way he so earnestly and affectionately requires it of you, by keeping his commandments. You will have a tender regard for the weak of the flock, and not despise the day of small things in any. You will be humble, you will be vigilant, you will be circumspect, and very much concerned for the honour of your Master. You will

endeavour, as much as possible, not to disgrace your holy profession in any one instance of outward behaviour; "if you have" indeed "tasted that the Lord is gracious," you will follow St. Peter into the depth of your hearts, to strike at the root of all inward corruption; you will meet the Spirit there for a true work of grace, and for ability to make the tree good, that the fruit may be good also. And especially that word by which you have been taught to know your fall and restoration, the mercy and truth, the justice and love of your God, to call upon him in the name of Jesus, and give yourselves up to the guidance of the eternal Spirit; which is God's covenant of peace to you, brought down from heaven, confirmed by his oath, sealed with the blood of Christ, and written in your hearts by the Holy Ghost; that word, I say, which is the record of all your mercies and all your hopes, you will value as your birthright, and greatest earthly treasure, and above all things desire the sincere milk of it, "that ye may grow thereby in the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness in Christ;" Eph. iv. 13. The Lord grant it may be sealed to you in all the riches of its grace, that you may abound in thanksgivings to God for it, and say in your day, of the fulness of Gospel light, what the psalmist said in the spirit of prophecy, "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy sin, and healeth all thine infirmities." Ps. ciii. 1—3.

I would now gladly bespeak the attention of all to the doctrine and exhortation of the text. My brethren, the Lord is very gracious. He left the glory he was possessed of at God's right hand, and came into this world to be the most despised suffering man that ever lived in it, that he might redeem us from our sin, misery, and death.

And his servants believe and taste his goodness, and, in the happy sense and experience of his love, feed continually upon the word, as new-born babes, for the growth of their Christian life; to keep their lamps burning, to have their faith strengthened, their hope animated, their charity warmed and enlivened, and to fashion themselves day by day, both outwardly and inwardly, to the holiness of it. This, and nothing but this, is conversion; this is your only rule, though you turn yourselves into never so many shapes to avoid it; this is the way in which you are to walk with Christ, if you would belong to him, and have any share in his mercies. If you think of getting to heaven in any other, you are miserably deceived; and must not pretend to take St. Peter, or any of his fellow apostles, for your guides; for they all speak the same things, with one mouth, from the same Spirit, and have no hope, nor message of grace, for any but those who come to the Lord Jesus Christ for it, love him in sincerity, and diligently use all the means of growing up under him to greater measures of faith and holiness.

But, nevertheless, if you have not attained to this, and do not find within yourselves that the words belong to you as believers, still they have a call and a blessing for you. Let them speak to you as unbelievers, to convince you of your wants and danger. For it is one end of them to stir you up to repentance and calling upon God, and to set his mercies before you, that you may seek after them, and be made partakers of Christ and his benefits. Does St. Peter exhort you to "lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings?" and did you never seriously purpose it? Have you no will, no prayer for this? Does he say, "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby?" and is that word nothing to you, either not

desired and applied for the pure end of spiritual growth, or totally neglected, and many foolish pleas advanced to excuse your ignorance of it? When you hear that the ground and reason of your readiness to comply with both parts of the exhortation is to be found in your having tasted that the Lord is gracious, have you nothing in your hearts to answer to this? Has Jesus no comfort for you, no power over you, nor place in your affections? Do you know no more of him, than that you were baptized in his name, and taught to repeat it in your Creed, but have so little sense and belief of your want of him to save you from your sins, to bring you by repentance to faith, and by faith to holiness, that if you were to be baptized now, it would be the last thing you would think of?

If all this is against you, let St. Peter tell you of it now, what blessings you come short of, what grace you despise, and how vainly you pretend to the name and hope of Christians. And, oh! think what you are, and what your condition is now, while I am speaking, that you may make haste and escape for your lives; fly to Jesus as your refuge from death, and, having tasted how gracious he is, give all diligence to make your calling and election sure, by "laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil-speakings; and as new-born babes, desiring the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." The Lord grant it, for his mercy's sake! and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore!

SERMON XXII.

To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious;
Ye, also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1 Peter, ii. 4, 5.

St. Peter, in the foregoing chapter, puts the Christians, to whom he wrote this epistle, in mind of the great benefits they had by their belief of the Gospel, and of the advantages they enjoyed above all that went before them, by living at a time when the whole counsel of God for the salvation of mankind was fully opened, and all his promises verified in the person and coming of Christ, to the end he might stir them up to live suitably to the mercy they had received, and "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure." The Spirit of God was strong upon him, and his heart so full of the glorious subject, that he could not contain his thoughts, but breaks out at once into this devout strain of thanksgiving: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," chap. i. 3; which hope, founded chiefly upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, whereby he was declared to be the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, with power, he tells them, was no less than that of "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them, and for all who shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto

salvation." "Of which salvation," he says farther, "the prophets," who delivered it to the world many ages before, "inquired" and searched "diligently;" having an earnest desire to know as much as they could of what they were inspired by the Holy Ghost to declare; but not able clearly to understand it, or not with so great advantage as those who saw it in its full manifestation and accomplishment. To which purpose Christ said, speaking to the disciples, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see these things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear these things which ye hear, and have not heard them;" Matt. xiii. 17. They saw them, indeed, but darkly, and afar off. They had the same faith in Christ, the same promises, and the same hope of deliverance and redemption by Christ, before his coming, that we have now; as it is said of Abraham, in particular, that "he saw the day of Christ, and was glad," John, viii. 56; but then he was revealed to them less perfectly, and the promises of God could not be placed before their eyes in so strong a point of light as they were to those who, by seeing him in person, had them confirmed beyond all doubt, and, as it were, put into their hands by actual possession.

May I speak a word to you upon this? Will you hear me? Has God a call and a blessing for the souls in this congregation? Oh! that we might all join our prayers for it with one mouth! Think, my brethren, what cause you have to bless God for appointing your lot, and bringing you into the world at that time when all these things, every thing foretold by the prophets, relating to your salvation by Christ, is fulfilled, done, and past. The Saviour is not now preached to you as he who *was* to be born of a virgin, and die for our sins; but we know, by infallible testimony, that he *did* come into the world at the time appointed of the Father, proved himself to be the Son

of God by the miracles he wrought, suffered upon the cross, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sent down the Holy Ghost to abide with us for ever. We have not, indeed, seen him with our bodily eyes; but remember what he says, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," John, xx. 29; blessed are they who hear and receive what is written of him, preached, and declared to them, "for there shall be a performance of all that has been told them." They shall find him in his gracious presence in their hearts, "turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," reviving them with a sense of forgiveness, confirming them in the love of holiness, sweetening prosperity, and even affliction, to them, making all things work together for their good, and cheering their souls with a blessed hope of seeing him in heaven, and praising God for him to all eternity. I say, know your advantage, be thankful for your privilege, behold your birthright; for St. Peter writes and speaks to you as much as he did to the Christians of his own time, if you were prepared for it, in these blessed words: "Whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet, believing, ye rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls;" receiving it in part now, in your deliverance from the curse and power of sin; and if you "gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you, at the revelation of Jesus Christ," when he comes to reward his faithful servants, sure to receive it hereafter, in the fulness of glory at God's right hand. These things, we are told, "the angels desire to look into." They did not know them once; they know them now only in the way that we do, as revealed to them by Christ's coming in our flesh; and the mystery of his incarnation and death, the mercy and wisdom of

God, in the redemption of a lost world by his own eternal Son, is such a fresh discovery to them of the riches of his nature, as employs their deepest attention, fills them with devout admiration of his glory, and is their new and everlasting song of praise, in union with the redeemed, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever;" Rev. v. 13. That you may be of this happy number, and die out of this world, only to join in the triumphant song of angels and glorified spirits, the Saviour, Jesus Christ, is now offered to you. If you come to him in humility and thankfulness, with knowledge of his benefits, and desire to be made partakers of them, you will, as St. Peter here tells you, be built into him as lively stones, in one spiritual house; you will enter upon your eternal employment now, and become "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." And this leads me to the design I have in discoursing upon these words: "To whom coming," i. e. to the Lord Jesus Christ, mentioned in the verse before, "as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." I shall, therefore, with God's help,

I. Consider what we come to Christ for.

II. What it is to come to him, or when we may be said to do so. And the opening of these two heads will afford me occasion to explain to you the several expressions in the text. The Lord give you the hearing ear, and open all to your hearts!

I. What we come to him for. We come to him for

what he is, and is here called, "a living stone." Our Lord had been spoken of by the prophet Isaiah under this appellation, and he himself appealed to it in his reasoning with the Jews; and therefore St. Peter seems to delight in dwelling upon it, takes it up again in the three following verses, and has unfolded all the instruction contained in it: which I hope to set before you the next opportunity; and shall confine myself, at present, to the expression in the text, "a living stone." *A stone*, solid foundation, or rock, as being able to sustain the weight of what is built upon him, and support it against all the storms, and all the assaults of men and devils to destroy it; and he is here called "a living stone," as being risen from the dead, and having life in himself from all eternity; to carry our thoughts beyond any earthly foundation, or building upon it, to what he is in himself, and to that spiritual house, which Christians are when they are grounded on him. And to show how all is upheld and strengthened by him in every respect, he is likewise called, and calls himself, "the chief Corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord;" Eph. ii. 21. So then we come to him, that we also may be as lively or living stones, quickened by him, and in him "builded together, for an habitation of God, through the Spirit," as St. Paul says; or, as St. Peter here says, "built up a spiritual house." Not like the Jewish temple, however adorned with goodly stones, nor any other edifice consisting only of dead materials, but a temple of the Holy Ghost, spiritually alive in every part and member of it; a temple of the living God, wholly consecrated to his service, in which he dwells and walks with us, and we glorify him in our bodies and spirits. And in this temple, the living stones in it, all together, and every one singly, are said to be "an holy priesthood." The Jews

had their high priest, and a whole tribe set apart to the office of ministering to God for the people. But this was an imperfect dispensation in many respects; the people by this means being kept, as it were, at a distance from God, and not allowed access to him; neither could the sacrifices which were offered by the priests on their behalf, obtain for them complete remission of sins, nor purge their consciences from "dead," or deadly "works, to serve the living God," as pure in his sight, and clean from all spot of sin. Whereas now, the way to the holiest, or the presence of God, is laid open to all, and we are encouraged "to come boldly to the throne of grace," as children to a father, and without any dread upon our spirits on account of sin; the guilt of it being wholly removed, and the wall of separation betwixt God and us broken down. We may now draw nigh to him as holy and spiritual, "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water," i. e. cleansed from all outward and inward defilement, in full assurance of faith that our sins are forgiven, and that God, according to his covenant, remembers them no more. I say what I do, not only upon the warrant, but in the very words of Scripture; and I wish you knew and perceived it, that you might know and be thankful for your privilege. The conscience of a sinner is purged, not by having no sin remaining, but none which God sees and imputes as such; the guilt which tormented, the load which lay heavy upon the soul, is taken off, and conscience has no more right to accuse and terrify the man for sin, than if it had never been committed. Is not this a most noble privilege, a desirable and happy change of our state, and what any one labouring under a sense of guilt, and dreading the displeasure of Almighty God, would give the world for? Hear, then, what St. Peter says: "We," all believers,

"are an holy priesthood;" which we cannot be, while God sees any spot or blemish of sin about us; and that I am sure can never be by any will, work, or cleansing of our own. Seeing, then, we must be pure, to approach to God in his worship, and our own hearts bear witness against us, that in ourselves we are wretchedly impure, and at an infinite distance from such a state, it is evident at once, that we can only be so by Jesus Christ. This, therefore, is one special end of our coming to him. And be it ever remembered, and assuredly believed, with great rejoicing in the conscience, and many thanksgivings, that through him, our great High Priest, and as parts and members of his body, we are clean, spotless, holy, and in him sanctified for the great purpose of offering spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God.

But notwithstanding the offer of such a privilege, though he came to a world of sinners, and was "chosen of God," as every way qualified for the work of our redemption, precious to God as his only begotten Son, precious in himself, and a most precious gift of God to man, yet we are here told, we know, he was "disallowed of men." His own people, the Jews, rejected and persecuted him, and at last crucified him as a malefactor and a blasphemer; because he appeared amongst them as a spiritual deliverer, took the covering from their hearts, beat down their pride and high esteem of themselves, stripped them of their fancied righteousness, brought a heavy charge of sin against them, and called them to repentance, and the hope of salvation by him, instead of boasting of their works, and trusting in their own righteousness. For the same reason, however chosen of God, and precious, he is still disallowed. It is hard for men to see the accursed nature of sin, and more especially their own sinfulness; and till they do, they will not, they cannot repent, nor see their want of such a Saviour. Their pride blinds

them, their ignorance ruins them. They do not come to Christ as a living stone, and as dead in themselves, to be built up, and made lively stones in him; but in the bottom of their hearts entertain a higher opinion of themselves for salvation, than they do of him, thinking they have life in themselves, and vainly attempting to build a tower of Babel that may reach to heaven, upon the rotten foundation of their own works. They will be priests to God, unholy as they are, not seeing their miserable unworthiness; how unfit they are to offer any sacrifices to God, how utterly impossible it is for them to offer any spiritual, acceptable, sacrifices to him, of a pure worship from a pure conscience, but by Jesus Christ, and as cleansed and sanctified by him for that office. My brethren, this deceit lies deep in the heart of man. And that you may not be carried away with it, to the hazard of your souls, to the loss of Christ, on whom you are to be built as your foundation for life, in whom alone you can be an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and by whom alone you are acceptable to God; let me now advise you,

II. To consider how we come to Christ, or when we may assure ourselves that we do. He is a living, life-giving stone; we are dead *as* stones, without power, without the will or thought to help ourselves; but may live, and be lively, by being built into him, the rock of our salvation. We were made and sent into the world to offer up spiritual sacrifices, to present our souls and bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, as our bounden duty, and reasonable service. Alas! we have no such hearts, no such wills; and are naturally averse to any pure, spiritual offering of ourselves, to the high and holy God, though our dependence on him, union with him, and worshipping of him in spirit and in

truth, is the great blessing of our lives, and will be our never-ending happiness in heaven.

But in Jesus Christ we are restored to the dignity and perfection of our natures, willingly to offer up ourselves, our prayers, our praises, our obedience, our hearts, continually to God; *He* in heaven, our great High Priest, standing at the right hand of God to present our spiritual sacrifices; *we* on earth, a holy priesthood, presenting them to him to be offered by him in the pure incense of his blood, to the throne of grace on our behalf.

See now what it is to come to him. It is coming to him for the benefits here mentioned, as well as others, with a sense of our want of them, and desire to receive them; and also with faith in him, as able and willing to be to us what he is here called, "a living stone," and to make us an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and to make them acceptable to God. I say, we must not pretend to come to him in ignorance of our wants, or without the truth of desire to receive from him what he knows to be necessary for us, or without faith in his goodness, and all-sufficiency to help us. It is an easy thing to call him Lord, to repeat his name in our creeds, and say we believe in him, because we have been taught it from our infancy; it is comparatively easy to take up a form of religion, to be very exact in it, and to outstrip many others in an outward show; but he wants to do a great deal more for us than all this, and we must come to him for a great deal more. He wants to have us come to him, as what we are, poor beggars, undone and helpless in ourselves, and for what he is, our Saviour, our life. And this you must come to, if you turn yourselves into never so many shapes to avoid it; do what else you will, you are not the persons of whom St. Peter here speaks. They, he says, came, meaning that all are so to come, to Christ "as unto a living stone," that in him

they might, as "lively stones, be built up a spiritual house." Do you hear this? and does it lead you to consider, that in your natural state you are dead to God, and can never be made alive unto him, but by being taken into Christ? Has the sense of your danger and misery been so lively within you, and brought home to your hearts with such clear conviction, that you could not help crying out many a time and oft, "Lord, save me, or I perish?" Have you been made to see, that you cannot raise yourselves out of your dead state, by any will, work, or power of your own, and in this sight of your condition, been willing that Christ should do it for you? Do you think he can? do you believe he will, dead as you are, build you as living stones into his spiritual house? all vile and polluted as you are in sin, make you priests unto God, holy and righteous in him, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable by him? Is this your design, your desire, your belief, in coming to him; and, what is more, have you done it? Consider what you say. If it was a worldly matter of any kind you wanted and had in view, — a farm, a shop, a cottage, and much more a large estate, — you would know what it was to desire and seek after it. If you had a broken limb, or were sick of a dangerous distemper, you would know what it was to look out for help. Now let conscience speak; when did you come to Christ, what request did you ever make to him with a true knowledge of your case, with earnestness of desire, and from the bottom of your heart, for his blessed relief, his work, life, and power in you? It was a great word he said, pointing to the ground, "I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham;" Luke, iii. 8. This seems to us hard work, even for almighty power; but, nevertheless, must be done in every one of us; and never is done, till we believe it, long to experience it in

ourselves, and come to Christ for it. If we have no such thought or purpose in coming to him, what do we come to him, what do we believe in him for? And what better are we for him, if he leaves us just what he finds us, as unbelieving, as fearless of sin, and as much under the power of it, as careless of our souls, as little turned to God, as worldly and unholy as ever? St. Peter says, "unto whom coming as unto a living stone, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house;" directing us to come to Christ for this end. And the plain meaning is, that without him, and till we are taken into him, as stones are fitted into a building, we are dead to all true knowledge and love of God, all life in him, or hope from him. And would to God you knew how dead, how perishing in sin, how unable to deal with it, or answer for it to God, and how you are hastening to the grave under a sentence of eternal death, that you might turn to Christ, and fly to him for refuge in the peril of your souls!

You put no value upon what is here brought to your remembrance, and, set before you, as your hope, that in Christ only we have life; perhaps you may think it strange that St. Peter should talk of *living stones*. Why, my brethren, he knew very well what he said; the words were given him by the Holy Ghost; and he hereby in the strongest manner puts us in mind of our naturally dead state, and of Christ's power to raise us from it. You may slight the privilege of being a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, your praises and thanksgivings, together with the obedience of a free heart, and of drawing nigh to God, with a full persuasion that your persons and your prayers are acceptable to him by Jesus Christ; but it is his work and office in you, the life you receive from him, the fruit he bears in you; and if you do not look for this at his hands, he is ready to say to you, what John Baptist did to the Scribes and Pharisees

who came to his baptism full of themselves, and feeling no want, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Why do you pretend to come to me, without any warning from your own hearts, when you neither know what you are, nor what I am, and will receive nothing from me?

Know then, that "his name is Jesus, to save his people from their sins;" to give them repentance, to wash them in his blood, to clothe them with his righteousness, to be their life, to bring them to the throne of grace, as devout and holy worshippers; and that all "who come unto God by him," must come to him, as the blind, the lame, the lepers did when he was upon earth, for his spiritual benefits, as they did for the cure of their bodily distempers. When he asked the blind man, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" he knew what he wanted, and answered at once, "Lord, that I may receive my sight;" Mark, x. 57. For this end chiefly he wrought his miracles of healing, that we might believe and trust in him for help in our own case. And he has not lost his power and compassionate heart, but is now present at this time and place, and still stands over us with these words in his mouth, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." If thou feelest the plague of an evil nature, and sin is thy disease, and wouldst fain have the burden of it removed from thy conscience, and the power of it from thy heart, he came into the world with this offer, and cannot deceive thee; "It shall be done unto thee even as thou wilt." And if sin is better to thee than mercy, or if thou settest an unreasonable value on thyself and thy own works, and in the main wilt be beholden for life to none but thyself, still he says, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt;" take thy own way, keep thyself from me, and make thy peace with God as well as thou canst. To all such, whether bold sinners or self-

righteous, he can be nothing. They will not come to him for life, and he has nothing else to give. He will bear our sins, and heal our infirmities, and fix us in a state of willing subjection to God; he will teach us to be thankful for mercy, and to pray for strength to keep mercy, and be our Mediator and Advocate with God for the acceptance of our sacrifices, and a supply of all spiritual blessings; this he will do for us, this he promises to those who come to him, and so he works in all that are saved by him. But if you desire and expect no such help from him, if you choose to lie dead in sin, or trust in yourselves more than you do in him; if forgiveness through him, and conversion by him, is not your business with him, — what shall I say to you? must I speak it? yes; and I pray God speak it where I cannot; he is disallowed and rejected of you. In a word, he cannot be mocked with a bare profession and outward appearance. His coming is to the heart, that it may come to him, to be built up a lively stone in his spiritual house; to offer *Him* up first as a sacrifice for sin, and then *itself*, a spiritual sacrifice, well pleasing to God by him.

Let me now advise and exhort you to bring this matter of your coming to Christ under examination. Do you know, do you consider what we come unto him for, and what it is to be saved by him? Surely you would if you belonged to him. He would be the pearl of great price with you, and his salvation your treasure, and the joy of your lives. You would not content yourselves with a confused, barren knowledge of him, which lets you sleep on quietly in your sins, and never brings you to him in distress of conscience for his forgiveness, nor roots one vice out of your natures. You would not then talk of your good hearts and good meanings; you would not make your civil, quiet lives, if they were much better

than they are, a pretence for standing off from Christ. If you truly believed that he died for your sins, you would see a curse in them which you never could have thought of, and be glad to have that load taken off your backs. Come, my brethren, it must be so; do not mistake all, be not deceived all your lives. Christ never saves a soul, without first opening its eyes to see sin, and condemnation for it. Then it can see the necessity of his blood-shedding, and be very thankful for it; then it can study to please him, and have a will to live to him, and hear him saying, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," John, xiv. 15. Give yourselves no rest, till you know such a work as this; and let me advise you by no means to think well of your state till you do; for then you will never come to Christ, to know a passing from death unto life. You will have nothing to ask of him, nothing for him to do; no desire to be partakers of his life, no spiritual sacrifices to offer unto God by him; but go to your graves with all your sins upon your heads, and die as much unbelievers as if you had never heard of the precious name Jesus. Let me speak a word more. What is it you trust in for salvation; upon what do you venture your everlasting hopes? Is it your baptism and Christian name coming to church on Sundays, though not regularly and constantly; and now and then, once in one, two, or three years, receiving the sacrament, and some of you that hear me never? Alas! this is but a poor form, and if Christ was working at the root of it, you would do a great deal more; you would keep your Sabbaths as unto the Lord; you would come rejoicing to the sacrament as often as you had opportunity; you would pray in and with your families; you would offer up your own sacrifice of prayer, and your hearts with it, to God in private; you would have a Christian appearance in all respects. But if your outward walk was never so fault-

less in the eye of the world, it can be no ground of your peace, till you have been seeking after Christ, from a sense of your undone state, as the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" resolve to know nothing for salvation but him crucified, praise God for him, and live as becometh his disciples. If you have feared God from your youth up, lived in no known sin, and kept a strict watch upon your heart, always believing in Christ as your Redeemer, and crucified for you, as well as for the greatest of sinners, renouncing the merit of your own works, and trusting only in him for your acceptance with God, I do not say, you are not come to him; but this is a very rare case; and I beseech you to consider whether it is yours, and whether you can say, as you will answer it to God, that you have been mindful of your vow in baptism ever since you could discern between good and evil.

On the contrary, have you been fearless of sin, and more especially blind to your own? Do you not make a conscience of examining your hearts and lives by the straight rule of God's commandments? Did you never see the extreme guilt of sin, God's hatred of it, and will to punish it, in the glass of Christ's sufferings? Did you never put the great question to yourselves with any degree of seriousness and concern, "What must I do to be saved?" am I in Christ or not? but take it for granted that all is well with you because you are called Christians, though you are ignorant of your condition in sin, ignorant of God, ignorant of Christ, and never saw yourselves perishing without him? Have you not to this day made him your hope, your confidence of rejoicing, your peace; knowing that there is no other way or means of reconciliation for sinful man with a just and holy God; and whatever you do, always humbled under a sense of your manifold defects, and in your very

best estate keeping close to him for pardon and salvation? Oh! see your danger; call upon God to take the veil from your hearts; all is wrong with you; repent and come to Christ. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you in all the riches of his grace. If your unbelief does not keep you from him, your sins need not. He knows what they are, what we are in them, and that of ourselves we cannot wipe so much as one of them out of his book; and he would have us know it too, that we may gladly receive the Saviour he has provided for us. Hear St. Peter telling you once more what you will find in him, and what he will make you: "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

SERMON XXIII.

Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner.

And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. 1 Pet. ii. 6—8.

The five first verses of this chapter have already been opened; in which St. Peter exhorts those to whom he writes, and in them all Christians to the end of the world, to walk worthy of their holy profession; by "laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies,

and all evil-speakings." Outward, gross sin of every kind they must avoid; and if they had not, they would not have been reputed Christians at that time.

But he requires still more; even the purification of the heart from those inward sins, which no eye of man sees, these here mentioned and all others; it being the only test of our sincerity with God, to set him always before us, as the Lord who trieth the reins and the heart; and to be more concerned to approve ourselves to Him who seeth in secret, than if the eyes of all the world were upon us. And, to enforce his exhortation, he puts them and us in mind of an argument or reason for our compliance with it, which no one who knows what it is to be a Christian, and what obligations he has to Christ, can well resist; "If so be," says he, "ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious," i. e. the Lord Jesus Christ in taking our flesh, in the labours of his life, and the sufferings of his death, that he might redeem us from the curse of sin, and eternal misery. The exceeding riches of his grace, and the love which moved him to become our Saviour, no words can express, nor heart of man think worthily of. But we must be utterly dead to all sense of it, and, whatever we pretend, can have no real belief, or taste, or feeling of it in our souls, if it does not constrain us to answer the end of it, by living unto him that died for us; purposing and endeavouring, as God shall enable us, to purge ourselves "from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," and to be an holy people to the Lord, in the truth and purity of an inward righteousness. If this foundation is laid in us, and we have been taught by the Spirit to cry *Abba Father*, and rejoice in our adoption, we can, we shall be the children and servants of God in the newness of a free obedience. If we have come to Christ in repentance for the remission of our sins; seeing in his death what sin is, how odious and abominable in the sight of God,

and how much it cost him to deliver us from it; we shall dread above all things to come again under the curse of it, and look to him in faith for that other great blessing of the new covenant, the grace of holiness, as well as the grace of forgiveness. So St. Peter says, acquainting us in the next words, what Christ will be to us, and what we are to propose to ourselves as one end of our coming to him, viz. "as unto a living stone, that we also, as lively stones," (it is a wonderfully striking expression of our dead state, and of his power in raising us from it), "may be built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood," (perfectly holy in him; and though not spotless enough in ourselves, for the office of being priests unto God, yet pressing on to it with the utmost sincerity of intention), "to offer up spiritual sacrifices," (not the blood of beasts, as the Jews did, but the blood of Christ; and together with it our thanksgivings for the mercy we have received, our prayers that all grace may abound unto us, our wills, our souls and bodies, our best and purest obedience), "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." He came first to us in great humility, and with bowels of melting pity, to seek and to save us, to bear our sins in his own body, and redeem us to God by his blood; and we have this day professed our belief that he will come to be our Judge. The Lord grant we may so improve his first coming, as to meet him with joy at his second; and "blessed are they who shall not be offended in him." For, elect and precious as he is, he was a "stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" to the Jews; and he still is so, at all times and in all places, to those who either reject him in unbelief, or, pretending to receive him as the Christ the Son of God, do not comply with his method of salvation. Alas! much the greatest part of those who are called Christians neither understand what it is, nor give themselves any manner of

concern about this kind of knowledge; and then how can they live according to it, or come unto God by him? To prevent this, if it pleases God that you should hear me, I shall endeavour, with his help, to improve the words of the text,

I. By showing how precious Christ is.

II. What it is to stumble at him, and why so many do.—Lord Jesus, raise up thy power and come among us, and with great might succour us. Send down the Holy Spirit of grace to prepare the hearts of all here present, to receive thee as the way, the truth, and the life; that in thee we may find rest for our souls, live in hope, die in peace, and be owned by thee at the last day as children and heirs of thy kingdom!

I. I am to show that Christ is precious. The apostle says, "elect and precious:" elect, as chosen and appointed of God for the office of our redemption—precious in the eyes of God, because he would undertake it—precious in himself, as the only begotten and eternal Son of God, equal in glory and majesty with the Father, and therefore every way qualified for the work he had to do—precious to us, as the atonement for our sins—the Lord our righteousness—the expounder of the law to us—the restorer of our natures to holiness—our resurrection and life—our Mediator and Advocate with God.

A short word upon each of these may be sufficient to give you a view of the preciousness of Christ in the glory of his person, in the riches of his love, and the exceeding great value of his blessings. I pray God you may attend to what is spoken, and accompany it with your own prayers for the sealing of it to your hearts.

The Lord Jesus Christ is precious in himself, and

considered in the glory of his Godhead as the Second Person in the blessed Trinity, the only begotten of the Father, and lying from all eternity in his bosom. And you see at once, in this point of knowledge and belief, how well he deserves the name of "chief corner-stone," to give strength and security to his spiritual house, and what a solid foundation we have in his nature of God, to rest our hopes upon. When the multitude of our sins rises up before the eye of conscience in sore conviction, and we are sinking under the burden of them, it is not a little matter that will support us. If we were to be told that a man like ourselves, or an angel of the highest order, had undertaken to reconcile us to God, our fears would still prevail, and we should have been ready to say, How can this be? How can any man make agreement to God for his brother? Or how could an angel, whose whole obedience in every point of his existence is due to God on his own account, obey for his fellow-creatures, and bear the weight of their sin?

When it was all laid upon Christ, in the day of God's fierce anger, it was a heavy load, dreadful indeed, almost insupportable to his spotless soul, and forced that astonishing cry from him—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matt. xxvii. 46. And if it was so severe a trial to him, how could any other in earth or heaven stand under the burden of it? But as he alone could, so he alone could take away the guilt of it; and that because he was God as well as man. I say in this knowledge of Christ, as very God of very God, God in our nature, born into it that he might redeem it from the curse it was under, we have a precious antidote against all our fears. Every thing he did was both the purpose of God and the act of God, for us; and therefore, we may be sure, fully sufficient to answer the end for which it was done; to take away the sin of the world, yours and

mine, and to discharge us for ever from that debt. And to God the Father he was precious, because he *would* do it. For when he was baptized of John, and thereby entered solemnly upon his office, God declared his acceptance of him to it, and approbation of him for it, by "a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," Matt. iii. 17. And again it is said,—"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life;" as if he had not loved him till then, or upon that account more than ever. The words are a marvellous opening to us of the extreme danger of our condition in sin, of God's love in rescuing us from it, and of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in carrying the Father's love and his own for perishing sinners into execution. Let it be a call to you to attend carefully to what follows; and as he is thus precious in himself, and in the eyes of God, chosen of God for the great work of our deliverance, willing to undertake it, and alone able to accomplish it, consider how precious he is and ought to be to us.

As the atonement for our sins, and the Lord our righteousness. He died, he lived, he obeyed, he suffered, for us; and when the soul is awakened to see its nakedness in sin, trembles for its guilt, and asks the question, "Wherewith shall I come before the most high God?" what hope can there be for such a sinner as I am? the answer of faith is, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" Acts, xvi. 31. Believe that he was appointed of God, and willingly offered himself to wash away thy sins in his blood; believe that he came into the world for this very purpose, that he might do the will of God, and fulfil all righteousness for thee, for thy discharge from the condemnation of sin, and acceptance to his favour, for thy present comfort and eternal justification; and upon the warrant of all Scrip-

ture thou mayest have the answer of a good conscience towards God, and speak peace to thy troubled thoughts. It is not in thy repentance, it is not in thy after obedience, or very best works; they cannot help thee to this answer, nor give ease to a mind labouring under the apprehensions of God's displeasure. Mark well what I say, and what foundation we must be upon for life. We must repent; but that is not our healing. We must do works meet for repentance; but that is not the ground of assurance. We are under a sentence of death by the sin of our first parents; who shall reverse it? We have pulled death upon our heads, every day and hour of our lives, by our own actual transgressions; what shall blot them out of God's book? His eternal truth demands our punishment, his almighty justice is armed against us; what shall stay his hand, or make him change his nature? If we were left to estimate the guilt of sin, and try it in our own balance, we should make a light matter of it, and be very favourable to ourselves. We should never have thought what a desperate evil sin is, and what a curse cleaves to it, if the Scripture had not told us. We should never have known, that the just desert of every single sin is death, if we were not well assured that it was so punished in the person of the first offender, and has slain, and will slay all the countless millions which were in his loins. We should have supposed that nothing was more easy than to make our peace with God, in case of transgression, by a slight repentance, a lame obedience for the time to come, if Christ had not come down from heaven to sustain the whole weight of divine vengeance against it upon the cross. Blessed be God, he did. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us," i. e. treated by God as having all the sin of the world in his own person, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" 2 Cor. v. 21. Sin must have death, even

death eternal; and we were bound over to it by innumerable offences. God must have the righteousness of a full obedience from us, and our own imperfect works are not that righteousness, but infinitely short of it; and we must have suffered the dreadful effects of his justice for ever, if he himself had not contrived the means of our deliverance; Christ, and he only, as I am telling you. Not we ourselves, nothing that we have done, or can do, nothing of our own. We must let that alone for ever; and if we were the greatest saints that ever lived, can have nothing but a false, deceitful peace, till we embrace the glad tidings of the Gospel, peace with God through Jesus Christ, and believe in him as the atonement for our sins, and the Lord our righteousness. If there is any thing farther, proper to be observed upon this head, it is, that he offers himself in both these respects to be the Saviour of all, even the greatest of sinners; and would to God they would take notice of it for themselves. The best can be saved only by Christ; and the worst may, if they come in upon his call, to receive the gift of forgiveness and righteousness at his hands. It is hard to say, whether we diminish the glory of Christ, and disparage his salvation more, by thinking that any can be saved without him, or that he cannot save all who come unto God by him.

Let us consider farther, that Christ is also precious to us, "as the expounder of the law of God." He has done it more especially for these two reasons, to show us first that all are transgressors of the law, when it is rightly understood; and then to bring all to him for deliverance from the penalty of it. He hath discovered to us, in the example of the Pharisees, who were not the least strict sort of men, Matt. v. what a poor thing it is in our eyes, and what sad work we make of it when left to ourselves. If we can but fashion our lives to some

kind of outward conformity to it, and justify ourselves to men, we think we have done enough, and look no farther. The law says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery;" and if we abstain from the outward act, we plead obedience, and bid defiance to it. No, says Christ; this is not the interpretation and full meaning of the law. The heart must be brought to account; and if you stop short of it, you try yourselves by a false rule; "for whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart," and is therefore guilty before God. So, in man's judgment, nothing but profane swearing, or forswearing, is a breach of the *third* commandment; nothing but downright murder a violation of the *sixth*. Whereas the intention and true spiritual interpretation of the one, is to teach and command us to keep up a continual regard to the presence of God, and to entertain such a profound reverence of him in our inmost thoughts, as would effectually restrain us from all profanation of his sacred name in our words and speech; and of the other, to guard us against those evil motions and risings of the heart, which are contrary to the love we owe to one another, and have the guilt of hatred, i. e. murder in the sight of God. And with this rule in our hands, we can go to the full extent of every other command, and are sufficiently instructed where and how to apply it. Do this faithfully, and the result of it will inevitably be conviction of sin, and the fastening of such a charge of it upon you as you can no way avoid.

I am not here supposing that you are such a wretched trifler with the commands of God, as to live in the open wilful breach of any of them, or to think that you can acquit yourselves to him by keeping only some of them, or even all but one. The case of such is evidently bad; and must be so more or less to their own consciences

whatever pains they may take to harden themselves against the fear of God. But what I am saying is this: if you think you have an equal, sincere regard to the whole law, in every point of duty as therein prescribed, be sure that you are not mistaken. Have you seen and considered that it has an inward as well as outward part; and that the inward is the more sacred of the two, as being your only security for a constant regular observation of the outward? Have you taken Christ for the expounder of it, and gone with him into the depth of your hearts? This is hard work; but in a matter where the soul is concerned it must be submitted to. If you would have any thing to do with him, you must suffer him to tell you what sin is, and to search every corner of the heart for it. And when you do, he has a piercing eye, and will bring sins to light which now are hidden from you. He will tear off all your disguises, all your decent coverings of a goodly outside, and lay you as naked and open to yourselves as you are to him. He will make you more vile and loathsome in your own eyes than ever you were proud and conceited; and never leave you till he has made you cry out, Unclean, unclean, sinful dust and ashes! You would willingly excuse him from this part of his work; but if ever he takes you in hand he will make you know the necessity of it, and how precious he is in it. If he opens your wounds and makes them smart, it is that he may pour his oil and wine into them, and because he cannot do it, till he has opened and searched them to the bottom. Nay, whatever you pretend, you never came to him, for his relief, if you never saw yourselves guilty of the breach of the law, I might say, the whole and every part of it, as he will teach you to understand it. Let him do this for you, let him sit in judgment upon your hearts as well as your lives, and show you what passes in those

secret chambers, and you will be glad to find him there as a Saviour too, taking your guilt and punishment upon himself. You will then throw away the rotten prop of your works, which are now, though falsely, your boast and pride, to the loss of Christ; and never talk more of salvation by them, when you know of a truth that you have not so much as one, which you can approve to God as perfectly pure, and clean from all spot of sin. And when Christ has thus made "the law our schoolmaster to bring us to himself," as our refuge from the sentence of it, and only hope, he will make use of it in another respect, and show it to us, as the rule of our hearts, and the way in which we must walk with him. He does not intend that we should live in sin, because he has delivered us from it. He came in great mercy to save us from the present burden and everlasting misery of it, because we had neither the will nor the power to help ourselves; but having done this, and reconciled us to God by himself, he must now come unto us as a refiner's fire, and will call loudly to us to put ourselves into his hands for the work of inward purification. I told you that it is another, and very precious part of his office,

To be the Restorer of our nature to holiness. "What could have been done more to my vineyard," said God to the Jews, "that I have not done in it?" Isa. v. 4. Well may Christ say, What could I have done more for the miserable sons and daughters of Adam, dead in trespasses and sins, and under a sentence of eternal condemnation, than to be made in their likeness, that I might shed every drop of my blood to redeem them from death and hell, and purchase for them a right to heaven? And why then will they not suffer me to do for them all that is in my heart, and make them a holy people? Why will they deny me in this, when it is for their own great happiness? What would you think of that man, who was ungrateful

to the person who had saved his life, or raised him from the lowest degree of poverty and wretchedness to a state of great plenty, showed an utter disregard to him in all his behaviour, and stubbornly refused to do any thing at his bidding? The admonition to you is short—you owe your souls to Christ. But I must speak a word more to what you call your good hearts, and open this point a little farther. "If ye love me," says he, "keep my commandments." Oh! that love! what can equal it, who can raise his thoughts to the height of it? Do you pretend to know something of it, to believe it, and enjoy the benefit of it, and can you think this, or any other return, too much for it? I say, where are the good hearts you talk of, and what words can be found to express the baseness of such ingratitude to such a Benefactor? The very truth is, you do not believe it; you do not know what you want him for, and what he has done for you, and therefore it is a matter of no consequence with you, whether you study to please him or not. For a true faith will have quite different workings; and the man who can look up to Christ as the Redeemer of his soul, will be always saying to him, as Paul did, when he struck him to the earth with a light from heaven, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts, ix. 6. He finds such a reason for obedience in his death, and the love there was in it, as nothing else can afford him; and the forgiveness of his many offences against the law, now opened to his heart in the whole length and breadth of it, brings him to look upon it with another eye than he has done, and with all possible advantage for performance. He knows his crucified Lord requires it of him, and will never own him if he is not renewed to the desire and love of holiness. He knows he was crucified for this very end, to deliver him from the just sentence and curse of the law; and in the

hope of this deliverance, he will be careful, above all things, not to resume the guilt of all his transgressions by living in any kind of wilful disobedience to it. Nay, he would not now sin against it, if he might; his will has received a new bent; his heart is changed within him; and if there is one thing which grieves him more than another, it is that he does not perfectly fulfil it in every thought, word, and deed. So Christ does, and must restore our natures, if we belong to him. He calls us to the holiness of a pure obedience, and strictly requires it of us; and the believer has both a new and a very prevailing reason in his love to hear his call to it, and a new will in himself to be possessed of it, as a very precious and necessary part of his salvation. But still, though the Lord Jesus Christ calls us to holiness, and so positively commands it, as one great end of his coming; though he promises to reward us for it far beyond what he can deserve, and will disdain and reject us for ever in the want of it; though there is such a mighty force in his love to move us to it; though we cannot come to him at all, but in repentance and sorrow for sin, and with a will to forsake it, and his death upon the cross shows us such a depth of malignity in sin as we could never have imagined: I say, though all this twisted together makes a very strong cord to draw and bind us to the obedience of God and of Christ; yet such is the untowardness of our natures, that we still want some more powerful help to subdue it, to bend our stubborn wills, to quicken our dead hearts, and keep us in the way of holiness. And therefore Christ, whose goodness towards us it is, "to put his laws into our mind, and write them in our hearts," as well as bear our sins, has purchased for us the gift of the Holy Ghost, to teach and rule in our hearts, to enlighten our minds with saving knowledge, to renew our

wills and affections, to strengthen our faith, hope, and charity, to support and comfort us, and be our guide unto death.

And, by the same Spirit, "he is also our resurrection and life;" his members being risen together and quickened in him; he in them, and they in him, dying and rising again, "and sitting together in heavenly places," where they now are in virtue of his right and title, and whither they must follow him in their own persons at the time appointed.

These, strange as they may seem, are the expressions of Scripture, as well as what follows: "For if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead," says St. Paul, "dwell in you"—as he must if you are Christians—"he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." If he now taketh possession of you whilst you live, he will lie down with you in your graves, and bring you out of them as he did Christ. So "he hath brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel;" 2 Tim. i. 10. Not that it was a thing altogether unknown and unthought of before; not only that he hath more fully declared the doctrine of a future state, and cast a new light upon it, as indeed he hath; but, by a clear revelation of the manner of it in his own person, actually accomplishing a resurrection unto life for all that belong to him, and putting into their hands a certain pledge of their own resurrection. And for this reason I suppose it is that so particular a stress is laid in Scripture upon the resurrection of Christ, as a distinguishing and most important article of our belief, and what the apostles were peculiarly ordained to bear witness to: all that we believe of Jesus as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, all our trust and hope in him, being contained in and confirmed by it. Happy are they who,

accounting Christ precious in this respect, as having conquered and abolished death, for them and in them, fear it not, but rather rejoice in the prospect of it as their dismission from the pains, sorrows, and sins of this mortal life, and entrance upon an endless state of glory.

Lastly, and to crown all his designs for the good of mankind, "he is our Mediator and Advocate with God;" continually offering up his blood on our behalf; carrying on the interests, and pleading the cause of every single soul which cometh unto God by him, with the same zeal, tender concern, and bowels of love, that he died for us; pitying our infirmities, presenting our prayers and services before the mercy-seat in heaven, sending down the Holy Spirit, and deriving grace, and all manner of blessings, upon his church and people. We may, therefore, "come boldly to the throne of grace," with our spiritual sacrifices, in full assurance of their being acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Oh! let us come *humbly*, too, and trusting only in him, knowing that we are all pardoned rebels; and though a holy priesthood in him, as St. Peter tells us, yet of ourselves utterly unworthy to draw nigh to God, and in our best estate having no hope of a favourable reception but in his name and powerful intercession.

On these, and other accounts, Christ is precious to them that believe. His exposition of the law, and searching operations, have been duly attended to, and had a saving effect upon them. His atoning blood, his perfect righteousness, his resurrection and mediation, the power of his Godhead, the labours and sufferings of his manhood, his life, and death — all is theirs. They receive and rejoice in these articles of their belief, as the glad tidings of the Gospel, and the peculiar blessings of the new covenant; esteeming holiness to be one of them, what Christ had ever in his eye, bound upon all his disciples by his repeated solemn commands, urged them to by

the sacred motive of his love, and what therefore, in the sense of that love, they find themselves powerfully engaged to.

But of this there is a sad counterpart mentioned in the text. For, precious as Christ is in himself, and in the glory of his salvation, and however chosen and approved of God, he was disallowed of men, much the greatest part of his own people the Jews; and to very many even of those who are called by his name, he still is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence:" which I shall proceed to give you some account of.

II. I am to show what it is to stumble at Christ, and why so many do.

To stumble at Christ, is not only to reject him in downright unbelief, and cry out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" as the Jews did, but also disowning him in the way of his salvation, mistaking the end and design of it, setting up our own reason, or, which is much the same, our own wills against it, preferring our lusts and worldly interest to it, living in great ignorance of it, and, in the main, being unconcerned about it. And this, in those who are baptized in his name, and call him their Saviour, is too much like what Judas did, saying, "Hail, Master," and betrayed him with a kiss! Matt. xxvi. 49. The general ignorance of Christ, and of the greatness and necessity of his salvation, is lamentable; and your esteem of it, and attention to it, must, of course, be as little as your knowledge: I mean, of those great points on which our salvation chiefly turns; and which are indeed so few, that none need be ignorant of them. None of you would, if the heart and the will were not more concerned in this kind of knowledge than the head. If it concerned this world, or your bodies, you would soon know a great deal more than you are now required to do for your

souls. If the Scripture taught an infallible way of thriving and growing rich, you would take it oftener into your hands; and St. Peter's exhortation, "to desire the sincere milk of the word," as new-born babes do the breast, would have some weight with you. Believe it, brethren, Christ saves none without making them know what he is, and how great need they have of him, and stirring them up to seek after him with a diligence and concern in some measure answerable to his worth and their interest in him. He says it plainly himself: "He that receiveth the seed into good ground, is he that heareth the word and understandeth it, and beareth fruit," Matt. xiii. 23; and how it should bear fruit without being heard and understood, is not be conceived. Do you ask what he is? Your God and Saviour. Would you know what you want him for, and what he saves you from? From the present curse and eternal damnation of sin. He was born, as on this day, to remove the guilt of it from our souls, and the power of it from our hearts. He took our nature, that in it he might make satisfaction to the divine justice for our sins, bear the punishment of them in his own person, and take them out of God's sight, never more to rise up in judgment against us. He came into the world to be our atonement and righteousness, to deliver us from death and hell, to rectify our mistaken apprehensions of God and ourselves, set us in the way of life, and purchase heaven for us. You will say, all this is well, and as yet can see no occasion for stumbling at him. But what are you willing to do to come at these benefits? Will you take Christ just as he offers himself, to do for you and in you what he knows to be needful, not refusing any part of his salvation, nor flinching from him in any one particular? Will you pray to him to grant you repentance? Will you suffer him to work it in you? Will you let him hold up the law to

you in his own meaning, and come close to your hearts with it, to show you your need of repentance? Will you deny yourselves in respect of any worth or goodness of your own, and trust in his atonement and righteousness as the stay of your souls? Will you be his servants in holiness, redeemed from your vain conversation in the world? These are the men for Christ, this is his work and office in us, this is himself; and if you now begin to entertain a different opinion of him, and look coldly upon him, you stumble at him, to your eternal undoing. Alas! very many do; by far the greatest part even of those who pretend to believe in him; and you now see the reason of it. O God, look upon us in mercy, and teach every heart in this congregation to give in a true answer to itself concerning the questions which have been asked! I will speak a word on each of them; and observe to you again, that they are but few, may easily be learned and remembered, and will certainly be applied to the saving of your souls, if you desire it.

Repentance is the beginning of salvation; and Christ therefore says, "Repent, and believe the Gospel," because there is no other way of coming to a Gospel state of peace with God, but by faith, nor to faith, but by repentance. If sin is no trouble to us, what have we to do with Christ, or any thing else, for the pardon of it, and why do we seek to get relief from it? Again, he says, "Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" Matt. xi. 28. Rest from what? From a burden we do not feel? You could as soon come to him to be restored to your sight when you know you have the perfect use of it. It is therefore evident of itself, if he had never said, "Repent or perish," that we cannot receive him as a Saviour, without seeing the evil of all sin, as well as the reality of our own, and a will to forsake it. And here many stumble grievously at Christ

and his word. If sin must be given up for him, this is too hard a condition; and the wicked will not forsake his way, though every moment he continues in it he is liable to lose Christ for ever. I speak first of notorious sinners, seen and known of all, who live in the open breach of any of the commandments, and whose case is confessedly bad, if the Scripture is true, till they repent. But if you are of the number of those who have a better appearance, and in the main stand fair in the eye of the world, for your honest dealing, civil behaviour, and moral character, do not therefore swell with self-conceit, as if you were as clear with God as you are with man, or yourselves, and need no repentance. You may have no better ground for your confidence than a deceitful comparison of yourselves with other men. But Christ has another rule of judging, and searches deep wherever he comes, and possibly you may stumble at him on this account. You certainly do, if you never came under the fiery trial of his law, and refuse to abide by his exposition of it. This is a greater trial than you imagine; and I fear you are backward to understand me on this head. But if we do not look for sin in ourselves where God does, what can the result be but ignorance of our condition, unmeaning prayers, and a false faith, or a vain pretence of believing in Christ without knowing why? Hear what he himself says: "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you," Matt. xxi. 31; i. e. great sinners can many times be struck with a sight of their guilt, cry for mercy, and enter into the kingdom of heaven, before those who justify themselves. And why do they justify themselves, but because they have not an eye to look into their hearts, and judge of their state by a rule of their own making? Know, therefore, that every commandment has a twofold signification, an outward and an inward sense; whatever sin it forbids, at the same time it commands the opposite

virtue, and both go to the fulfilling of it. When it says, "Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven image;" the right understanding of it is, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God in spirit and in truth, with the utmost devotion and reverence, and depending only on him. When it forbids murder, it commands love; or adultery, it commands purity of heart. When it says, "Thou shalt not steal;" the meaning further is, Thou shalt labour diligently to keep thyself from want, and be ready to give to every one that needeth: and so of all the rest. Indeed, my brethren, till you thus judge yourselves according to Christ, and with his rule in your hands, as interpreted by him, you stumble at him, you disallow him. If you plead freedom from the outward gross act of sin, he will say to you, This is well; but do not stop here, O man! go on; go to the heart; my command reaches thither; and he can never take you up to do you any good, till you submit to him in this important and necessary part of his office, as the expounder of the law, in its full extent and meaning, and suffer him to tell you what sin is, and what sinners you yourselves are. He is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; and faith lays fast hold on that precious saying for life, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And why is it so? Why does every awakened soul fly to him for safety, but because it has an eye given it to see its secret as well as open sin, and death the penalty of all sin? and therefore receives him in truth and sincerity, and with many thanksgivings to God, as its only atonement for the guilt that is upon it. Again, he "is the Lord our righteousness;" the righteousness appointed of God for us to trust in, as our full justification, and title to heaven; he fulfilling the law in our stead, and thereby doing that for us which must of all necessity be done, and we could not do. But if we

refuse to take the gift of righteousness at his hands; if we do not account ourselves just before God, only and altogether for his merits; if we trust in ourselves, and in our own works, as much or more than we do in him; what can it be owing to but measuring ourselves by a false rule, and neither considering how much goes to the making of our works perfect, nor that they can never be accepted of God while they are imperfect? Take notice, I beseech you, how all hangs together, and one thing depends upon another in our salvation by Christ. "By grace we are saved through faith;" Eph. ii. 8. What shows us the necessity of this grace, and of receiving it in repentance by faith? Sin, and death by sin. What discovers sin to us? The law, as expounded by Christ, and set home upon our hearts, both in the outward letter and spiritual sense of it. Does God require perfect obedience to it at all times, and must we all have this to plead for ourselves? And where, then, shall we find it but in the person of Christ standing in our stead for that obedience and righteousness which the law absolutely demands on pain of death, and we have not performed? Take one link from this chain, and the whole is broken; reject Christ in any of these particulars, and he can be nothing to you but "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." You will mistake your duty, deny your sin, and set up your own works against him, miserably defective as they are, to the hazard of all your hopes.

Lastly; we must by no means stumble at Christ, as sent of God to restore us to his image in holiness; for this would be wretchedly to mistake him, every thing belonging to him, and done by him. It is true, the salvation he brings us was altogether wrought by himself; and if ever we are made partakers of it, we must entirely renounce ourselves in this respect, as utterly unable to accomplish any part of it, receive it as a gift and unde-

served mercy, and ascribe the whole glory of it to him. Lost and undone in ourselves, what could we do in this great work of our redemption? Remove mountains, bid the sun stand still, raise the dead to life, create a world, and then you may think of making satisfaction to the justice of God for sin, conquering death, rising out of the grave, and forcing your way to heaven by your own works.

"O Jesus, thou blessed babe born at Bethlehem, thou camest (as on this day) to do the will of God for us men, and for our salvation, because thou alone couldst do it. It was thy might, and thy work, and in this thou hadst no helper. We have only this to ask of thee, that we may be grounded in the faith of thy love, and keep it, by living worthy of it." And surely, my brethren, he has taught us how to do this. We must receive a law at his mouth, and follow him in the way of his holy commandments. We must abhor and forsake all sin, to the cutting off a right hand, or plucking out a right eye, because it crucified him; we must see the curse of it in his sufferings; and our obedience to him must be very dear to us, because he who died for us absolutely requires it, and has declared over and over again, in the most peremptory manner, that we cannot belong to him if we will not be governed by him. Does he call us to repentance as the first step in our way to him? What is that but a sense of the evil and damnableness of sin, with a sincere solemn purpose to renounce it? Is it of so deadly a nature, and so hateful to God, that nothing but his blood could wash out the foul stains of it; and do we believe that there is no possibility of peace with God, but in virtue of his atonement and sacrifice? Are our own works or righteousness so unfit to be offered to God, because of the mixture of sin there is in them, that we must of all necessity have a better righteousness made over to us, for our justification? Are we so vile, because

of sin, that we must not presume to draw nigh to God, but in the name of Christ, and with humble trust in his mediation? And is he our resurrection and life, because we have so much sin cleaving to us, in our very best estate, as would have left us for ever under death and condemnation? What then is sin? And how can we think that God will accept us in the will of retaining it, when he will accept nothing from us without Christ, nothing but Christ for us, because of the remainder of sin in our natures; and seeing that we cannot take one step to Christ, without knowing our vileness in sin, and condemnation for it, and resolving to repent of it? Put these things together; and see here again, how the several parts of Christian salvation are linked to one another — repentance to the will of coming to Christ, faith to repentance, and holiness to faith — and then, if you mistake him in this great end and design of his coming, to make us a holy people to the Lord, it is wilfully; and your sentence is already written, "Those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me;" Luke, xix. 27. — Let me just take up the expression, "holy to the Lord." Christian holiness is more than the morality of the world. It is not only a smooth life, or civility of manners; you may call it convenience, worldly prudence, the way to get and keep a reputation, philosophy, and what you please; and many things it will do to make a fair show in the eye of the world; but if Christ is not working at the root of it, it is nothing but pride of heart, and horribly defective in the sight of God. In a word, the holiness of the Gospel is the genuine fruit of a renewed, pure heart, offering up itself continually to God in love; and the dedication of ourselves to him, our souls and bodies, our estates and callings, with a single eye to please him, for the command's sake, for conscience

sake, for Christ's sake; and, whatever we do, trusting only in him for our acceptance with God.

And now let St. Peter persuade you not to be offended at Christ in any respect; but to take him as he is, and offers himself, and as you must, if you receive him at all. Here is an excellent reason given why you should, in these words: "He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded." A sinner, and not confounded! vile man, a rebel to God in the whole form of his life, and the strong bent of his heart, and not be confounded! Did not Adam's one sin confound us all, and give us up to death, and all the pains and sorrows that lead to it? And can we escape, who have disobeyed God a thousand times over, shall we not be confounded? No, there shall not a hair of your head perish: for Christ is therefore precious to them that believe, because they know he is their Redeemer, both from the curse of the first man's sin, and all their own. This, my brethren, is the very hope of the Gospel; and the answer of God to repentance and faith is, "The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die;" 2 Sam. xii. 13. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," and live as they believe. On the contrary, if you stumble at Christ on any account whatsoever, if you think he comes too close to your hearts, and searches every corner of them too narrowly with his law, for sin; calls you too strictly to repentance, and newness of life; lays you too low in your own eyes, and exalts himself too much in being all in all for salvation to every soul of man; if he is too humbling, too holy, too all-sufficient, too precious a Christ for you; if these are the wretched causes of his being disallowed — as, indeed, they are, whatever else is pretended, — then hear what the Lord himself says, "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken," dashed in pieces, as a glass would by being thrown

against a stone; "but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder," as it will fall thus dreadfully heavy on all the impenitent and unbelieving when he comes to judgment.

But does not the apostle here say, that those to whom he is a stone of stumbling, and rock of offence, "were thereunto appointed?" And does not this seem to imply that it was the will of God they should, and could not do otherwise? No, by no means; it would be dreadful indeed to think that any are so appointed, and, as I may say, forced upon their damnation. Observe what he says: "They stumble at the word, being disobedient;" and therefore plainly charges all upon the disobedience and stubbornness of their own wills; and his meaning is, that they were set and bent upon it by their own evil disposition, and that it would inevitably turn to their destruction; to which all who do so stumble are certainly appointed, i. e. to reap the fruit of their own disobedience, according to the fore-mentioned words of our Lord, and which St. Peter seems here to have had in his eye.

The Lord grant we may take warning both from the master and his faithful servant. Oh! be not offended at your God and Saviour, for any thing he requires you to do or believe. Keep in mind the mercy of this day, lay it up in your hearts, and carry it on to every day of your lives. Think, I say, on the mercy and glory of this day, in which he condescended to be born in our flesh, that in it he might do great things for us. How great the angels knew and told us, when they all rejoiced together for our sakes at his humble birth, and sang, "Glory to God in the highest, for peace on earth, and good will towards men;" Luke, ii. 14. By taking our nature he redeemed it from the curse it was fallen into; he sanctified it by his life, he expiated the sin of it by

his death, he raised it from the grave, and is now set down in it at the right hand of God. Behold your peace, and who it was that wrought it! We had no hand in it, no thought to contrive it, no will or power to effect it. It was all the act and deed of Christ for us, the purchase of his life and death, and is altogether his free gift to us. Take it, and you may rejoice in the faith and hope of a Christian, that God is a reconciled Father; refuse it, and you are lost for ever. And it is refused, when we either take any share of it to ourselves, or do not improve it to holiness of heart and life. "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more;" Heb. viii. 12. Here is one part of God's covenant, or royal grant, to man ruined by sin. The other is, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." Ver. 10, 11.

My brethren, so he is a God to us, so we are Christians and his people, so we know the Lord, and in this knowledge of him, all things pertaining to life and godliness. And both parts of this blessed covenant are his glory, his mercy to us, and work in us. He receives us to the grace of forgiveness, that we may know him in his love; and when we do thus know him by a true faith, he enables us to glorify him in the fruits of it, and walk with him as all his children and servants do, in the newness of a pure obedience.

Lord Jesus, take us into thyself, that, having tasted how gracious thou art, and, being grounded on thee, the rock of our salvation, we may give glory to God; lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings; loving one another, with a

pure heart fervently; as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby; and be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, the service and thanksgiving of our whole lives, acceptable to God by thee, our blessed and only Saviour. And, O Almighty God, who hast given us thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit, through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

St. Peter, in the foregoing verses, having spoken of Christ from the prophet Isaiah, as a living stone of God's laying, or foundation of life; and how precious he is to believers, though he was disallowed and rejected of men, more especially his own people, the Jews; proceeds in this and the following verse to put them in mind of the high privileges they were invested with as Christians, what a great and happy change was made in their state, and what cause they had to rejoice in it. *But ye*, notwithstanding his being a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to the disobedient, *ye*, says he, they to whom he wrote, and all Christians to the end of the world, "are a chosen generation;" as Christ was chosen of God, so

are they in him, and beloved of God for his sake: "A royal priesthood;" so St. John says, "He hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father;" Rev. i. 6. "We who were far off are made nigh by his blood," Eph. ii. 13; have the liberty of approaching God in Christ our Head, as being one with him; and may come boldly to the throne of grace, as a royal priesthood; it is a very high thing to be spoken of such sinners as we are, but the poorest beggar, believing in Christ, is entitled to this privilege: "a holy nation," washed in the blood of Christ from all spot of sin, keeping themselves from the defilement of it, and studying to be like him in holiness. And he says farther, that Christians are "a peculiar people;" what the Jews once were, they are now, Jews and Gentiles in one body, God's peculiar people, his right and property, what he esteems his own, and as such distinguished by his favours, and heirs of his blessings. And they were thus separated, he tells them, from the rest of the world, to be "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people," for the ends of God's glory, as well as their own salvation. As "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork," (Ps. xix. 1.) so they were to "let their light shine before men, to the praise of the glory of his grace;" that others, seeing the mighty change which had been wrought upon them, and acknowledging the divine power in it, might be allured by it to come to God for the same change in themselves, that they too might be "called out of darkness into his marvellous light." My brethren, hear your call in the words this day: "A chosen generation! a royal priesthood! a holy nation! a peculiar people!" Poor worms of the earth, sinful dust and ashes, what greater can we think of, than to have such honour put upon us! When you hear the words, how can you help saying to yourselves,

what can be more desirable than to be one of this number? And yet such you will be, when you are called out of darkness into the marvellous light of God and of Christ. I pray God I may be able to help you in the understanding of these expressions, the darkness of unbelievers, the light of Christians; and may the Spirit of the Lord speak them in their full sense and virtue to all our hearts! I shall therefore take occasion from these words,

I. To consider what a state of nature is, here called darkness.

II. A state of grace, or light.

I. A state of nature; that is, what you may suppose that of a man to be, who knows no more of God and religion than his natural reason teaches him, confines all his views to this life, and is ignorant of the state of his soul; or if he has the Bible in his hands, sets no value upon that kind of learning, makes no use of it, does not concern himself about it, but continues in the main as insensible and regardless of the great truths contained in it as if he had never heard of them. Let such a one be never so wise in the things of this world, good-natured, prudent, civil, with a reputation for honesty and fair dealing, put the matter as high as you will, add some form of religion to all the rest, his condition is here told him, he is in darkness. And that more especially in these respects; he is ignorant of God — ignorant of sin — ignorant of the way of salvation; or, which is the same thing, whatever knowledge he has of these points, it settles altogether in the head, without reaching his heart, influencing his endeavours, or affecting his practice. The former of these, or downright ignorance, is the case of those who lived before the coming of Christ, or never heard of him; the other, of

those, who by living in Christian countries, and often hearing the peculiar doctrines of Scripture spoken of, cannot be supposed to be totally ignorant of them, but through carelessness, self-conceit, or attachment to the world, that is, upon the whole, unbelief, receive no benefit from them.

1. The natural man is ignorant of God. He neither knows what he is in himself, nor what he is to us, what he requires of us, or will do for us. And for this reason he is said in Scripture to be without God; the God he believes in being one of his own making, to suit his inclinations, and suffer him to go on in his own way. He does not understand that he was made and sent into the world to live in a willing subjection to him, to reverence his authority, and be wholly at his disposal, and therefore does not take him for his Lord and Governor. He may not be openly and notoriously wicked; he may be prudent in the management of his worldly concerns, and so far wise as neither to waste his substance, nor destroy the health of his body by any kind of intemperance, nor live so as to hurt his reputation, nor bring needless inconvenience upon himself; but in all this he has no regard to God, nor design to recommend himself to his favour. And as he is without a sense of God's government and authority, so he does not know or consider that his heart is God's due, nor what it is to give it to him. Let what will befal him, good or evil, he is still bowed down to the earth, looks for his happiness no where else, and has not the least thought of choosing God for his portion. He may believe that he gives and takes away, and be more or less pleased with him as he receives more or less from him; but he does not consider him as the great object of his love, and entitled to the chief place in his affections. "He that cometh to God," with a right knowledge of him, "must believe

that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," Heb. xi. 6, that is, in truth and earnestness of desire, as their portion in time and eternity. But this is not the temper and character of the natural man. His ignorance of God prevents his coming to him; and present and sensible things are so much the idols of his heart, and the end of his living, that he cannot seek him at all, and much less with any degree of diligence, as his treasure and exceeding great reward. The almighty power of God is not his trust for support and protection. The universal presence of God, as privy to all his thoughts, words, and actions, and always at hand to supply his wants, is no part of his comfort. The perfections, the will, the law of God he is unacquainted with; his head, his heart, his whole soul, are otherwise employed, and his will bent against them. The Scripture says more, "they are foolishness to him," and that "he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned;" 1 Cor. ii. 14; that is, by a light which he neither has nor desires. And if there is one thing in God which he chiefly dislikes, or makes less account of than another, and endeavours to keep at the greatest distance from his thoughts, it is his justice. His mercy he can acknowledge and speak well of; but then it is the only article of his creed; and if God is any thing else, if he is not only and altogether mercy, without truth, without holiness, without justice, by his own confession he is an unknown God to him. In a word, he is ignorant of God as a Being who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, with entire devotion, and unfeigned desire of his blessings, and who strictly requires it of him. He calls not upon him, he prays not to him, from a sense of his spiritual wants, has nothing to ask of him, keeps up no intercourse with him, respecting his soul; and if ever he uses words to this purpose, it is because

they are put into his mouth by others,—they cannot be the language of his heart.

2. As the natural man is ignorant of God, so he is likewise ignorant of sin, its deadly nature, and prevalence in himself, and therefore denies it where it is, excuses it when it cannot be denied, and upon the whole makes a light matter of it. Indeed, ignorance of God and ignorance of sin go together, and it is hard to say which is first; but certain it is that they mutually strengthen and support each other. We mistake the nature of God because we know not what sin is; and again, our ignorance of sin, and unwillingness to know what it is, keeps us in ignorance of God. He is the hater and avenger of sin. This is the nature and character of the God with whom we have to do, of which the sin and punishment of the first man is full proof; and I may venture to affirm that there never was, nor ever will be, a sin in the world unpunished. If you are at a loss to understand me, think of Jesus Christ. If there was a single sin of yours or mine, which he did not take up, and bear in his own body on the cross, it would sink us to hell. And here the natural unenlightened man is all blindness, sees no such evil in sin as is pretended, and laughs at the word damnation. Though the Scripture from beginning to end is all a history of God's dealings with men on account of sin, of his will to punish it, and the methods he has taken to prevent it; though he feels the truth of it in all the calamities which befal him, in the pains, sicknesses, and sorrows of this mortal life, and knows that he must feel it in the death of his body; he will not understand that there is such a killing power in it, nor that he is under the curse of God for it. And, besides his ignorance of the evil quality and destructive nature of all sin, he is blind to his own, does not perceive what a strength it has in himself, and what

a law it is in his members. And the reason is, because he does not trace it up to its root, nor suffer the law of God to sit in judgment upon his heart. If he is not one of the worst of men, and for the most part abstains from outward, scandalous sins, he looks no farther, and will not be persuaded that God does. Secret sins, pride, malice, guile, envy, wrath, fretfulness against God and man, and much other filthiness of spirit, are unobserved, or the guilt of them denied under pretence of infirmity, or the unavoidable corruption of nature. Whereas that very nature, as the root of such evil fruits, must necessarily be a great part of every man's sin; and if it is not seen, and confessed, and lamented as such, we shall be for ever hidden from ourselves. And from hence it comes to pass that the natural man sees no sin in not resigning himself to the disposal and authority of God, and living in professed subjection to him as his Lord and Governor; no sin in keeping his heart from God; no sin in not seeking after God; no sin in a continual course of worldliness, to the neglect of his everlasting portion in God; no sin in any thing but what exposes him to present loss, inconvenience, or the censure of the world.

3. And as he is ignorant of God and of sin, he must of course be ignorant of the way of salvation, or averse to it in his heart. He cannot desire and seek after it, any more than he would for recovery from a bodily distemper, when he thinks himself in perfect health. The way of salvation, as declared in Scripture, and I know of no other, is by Christ's satisfaction to justice, and faith in him as a sacrifice for the sin of the world. And this faith, in every one who flies to it as his remedy, necessarily supposes sense of sin, of the heinousness of it, and the wrath which is due to it. And again, this sense of sin, wherever it is real, as of its being odious in itself,

contrary to the holiness, purity, and commands of God, and exposing us to his displeasure, will of course be accompanied with repentance, and a will to forsake it. And lastly, this work of conviction, repentance, and faith, will infallibly carry him on in the way of Christ's salvation, and beget in him an earnest, sincere purpose to be made partaker of his holiness, with a resolution to put himself into the Spirit's hands for newness of heart and life. But what a mystery must all this be to the natural man! who denies his sin, or never searches his heart for it; sees little or no evil in it, and therefore no necessity of repentance; does not think he wants any such atonement for it as the blood of Christ, and is entirely ignorant both of himself, and of all the perfections of God; even of that mercy on which he builds his hopes, and is the only thing he thinks of in God, or rather makes a pretence of it for not thinking of him at all, or having any dealings with him in the depth of his soul. For mercy is compassion shown to the guilty, or remission of a debt. But where there is no debt, nor acknowledgment of guilt, mercy has nothing to do. It cannot be understood nor believed, and the offer of it will be slighted; just as you would scorn any man, who should pretend kindness in forgiving a debt which you never owed him, or saving life when you had done nothing to forfeit it.

Such is the state of every natural man; a state of horrible and gross darkness, if ignorance of God, of himself, of sin, and salvation from it, can make him so. And under this image the Scripture frequently represents it, to bring the matter home to our senses, and convince us of the extreme danger and misery of our condition in ignorance or unbelief. What a traveller would be in the darkest night, and in an unknown road, beset with robbers, and full of deep pits, such is the condition of

the soul travelling to another world, and boldly venturing on in spite of danger, without one star to guide it. What the earth would be without the light of the sun, dark, barren, and uninhabitable, that every one is, in respect of eternity, without the light of heaven shining upon his soul. But perhaps you will say, surely there are none such among Christians, who are baptized into Christ, worship God in his name, profess their belief in him as often as they meet together, and hope for salvation by him. What, are there no open sinners, none walking contrary to the Gospel, no careless ones, no unbelievers among us? Do all attend strictly to the one thing needful, and give all diligence to make their calling and election sure? Are all Christians in knowledge and practice as well as name, believing in God, trusting in Christ, guided by the Spirit, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life? Bethink yourselves one by one, whether it is so or not. I judge no man; neither do I pretend to mark out the exact boundary between light and darkness. But certainly it behoves every man to try himself, how far he is in the one state or the other; and perhaps you will be better able to judge of this matter, and may know something more of yourselves, when I have showed,

II. What a state of grace, or light, is.

It is the knowledge of God, and of ourselves in Jesus Christ, with a conformity of heart and practice thereunto. I say, in Jesus Christ; for without him we know nothing, neither God nor ourselves, neither sin nor deliverance from it, neither our business in the world, nor the means of securing our portion in the next. He is the opener of the kingdom of heaven; he hath purchased it for us, and with the light which he brought down from thence

we shall come to the everlasting possession of it. Let us but lay him for our foundation and chief corner-stone, and we shall be built up in the knowledge of every thing than can concern us, pass quietly and safely through the world, enjoy life, and welcome death. For he is "the way, the truth, and the life," John, xiv. 6; the way to heaven, the truth of God, and the life of our souls. In him, and him only, we are light in the Lord, in a state of grace, holy and beloved, the children of God, and heirs of his kingdom. And a marvellous light it is to those who are effectually called into it, and receive it into their hearts. It is now presented to you; and I pray God you may know it according to the apostle's commendation of it, and say as he did, and all believers can, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ;" 2 Cor. iv. 6.

When St. Peter opened the kingdom of heaven, God's kingdom of grace, or the Gospel of salvation, to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, he summed up what he had said to them in these words: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost;" Acts, ii. 38. And again, when he opened the same doctrine of grace to the Gentiles, in the person of Cornelius, he concluded his discourse at that time with saying, "To him give all the prophets witness, that, through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins;" Acts, x. 43. Forgiveness of sins, therefore, was the sum of his preaching upon these two remarkable occasions, and the great point he had to declare. Let us proceed with this light in our hands, and see how it looks backward and forward, and to what kind of knowledge it will lead us.

Salvation is by the grace of forgiveness. Then we are naturally in a state of guilt, under a sentence of condemnation, and, without mercy, liable to perish for ever. Behold, it has been showed us from the Lord, and great cause have we to believe in him as the God and Father of mercies. Again, forgiveness is by Christ, in his name, for his sake, and through his blood-shedding. Then there is a justice in God terrible to think of, and which could not otherwise be satisfied than by the death of his own Son, bearing our punishment. Then, likewise, he is a holy God, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot but abhor the disobedient and ungodly. Again, what is sin, and what are we in sin? We see plainly, in the death of Christ for it, what a curse it brings us under, that there is a depth of evil in it far beyond what we could ever have imagined, and that God will not suffer it to go unpunished. The wages of it is death, and death it must have. This is God's eternal, unalterable sentence against it; and if no ransom can be found for the forfeited lives of our souls but his only begotten Son, he can deliver him up to be a sacrifice of atonement for us, but he cannot make sin to be what it is not, a harmless thing and unworthy of punishment, nor deny himself by acting contrary to his holiness, truth, and justice. So then, by looking backward from the cross, we have a clear view of the nature of God and the nature of sin, and of our condition in sin; we are already in possession of a great deal of valuable truth, and so far come into the light which St. Peter here tells us of.

Now, therefore, look another way; look forward, and see whether the knowledge we have already gained will not carry us on to other points. In Christ crucified God is manifested, and, as it were, made visible to us. We see him just, holy, merciful, condemning sin, and sparing the sinner; we see sin in all its guilt, and God in all the

glory of his love. But we must not stop here. When you see sin thus punished, and God thus incensed against it, can you, will you live in it? Will you provoke God to take back his forgiveness, and lay that heavy load of vengeance upon you which he laid upon Christ? Will you not see what sin is, in his suffering for it? Will you not put the accursed thing from you? Will you not repent? If Christ had not positively said, Repent, surely the matter must be evident to your own reason; and when you see God's abhorrence of sin, and indignation against it, in so strong a light, it must needs create abhorrence of it in you, and convince you of the necessity of repentance. But now, when you have likewise gained this point of knowledge, and purpose to repent and put your purpose in execution, what will you do? Will you look no farther? Will this set you clear with God? Will your repentance save you? No: your faith; your faith. This is the answer of all Scripture, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." There is your remedy, faith in Christ taking away the sin of the world, and your sin. You must know, and believe assuredly, that no repentance, nothing that you can do, no will or work of your own, can wash out the foul stains of sin, and remove the curse of it from your soul and body; and that you must have suffered it for ever in your own person, if Christ, by the appointment and will of God, had not taken it upon himself. Here, then, is another point of knowledge gained, namely, faith; take one step more, and you will come full into the light. If what you know of God and of sin, as seen in Christ crucified, has brought you to repentance, and your repentance to faith, your faith will bring you to holiness. It will be the earnest desire and wish of your souls to live unto him that died for you, by keeping his commandments. And if his love does not bind you to his service; if it does not con-

strain you, by a sweet force, to show your love to him in the very way he requires of you; if you are not willing to obey him, and come unto God by him, a willing, devoted people, you must not pretend to believe in him.

You will say, Must we know and believe all this to be in a state of grace, that is, of salvation? Yes, undoubtedly; unless you can give a reason why you should choose to know and do less, or how you can be Christians without the very thing which makes you so, Christian faith and practice. St. Peter says of those to whom he wrote, without any distinction of high or low, learned or unlearned, that they were "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, to show forth the praises of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." Have these words no meaning? or can they possibly belong to any who are ignorant, unawakened, or unconverted, and set no value upon the high and holy state signified by them? Is it a marvellous light which teaches nothing, discovers nothing? and can those be said to be called and come out of darkness, who love it, and plead for it, and are so infatuated as to think well of their condition though they continue in it all their lives? Remember that the Catechism teaches every one to say, "I heartily thank our heavenly Father that he hath called me to this state of salvation, and I pray unto God to give me his grace to continue in the same unto my life's end." But how can this be? How can any thank God for calling them to a state of salvation which they know nothing of? or how can they pray to him for grace to continue in it, when they make so little account of it as not to think it worth the understanding? Christ, I told you before, is to the soul what the sun is to the world, and wherever he comes, light comes with him; though not in the same degree to all, yet in such a work to every man as he cannot but be

sensible what it is, that he values and desires it, and is in Christ's hands for it. I say again, in answer to all such ignorance, let it proceed from what cause it will, wickedness or worldliness, sloth, or a proud conceit which will not be taught of God, that it is not a Christian state; and that those who are in a state of grace do and must know what it is, and what they have been seeking after. Their own sin has been discovered to them, together with the guilt and damnableness of all sin; they know that, by the just judgment of God, they are under a sentence of death, and that none could deliver them from it but Christ; to him, therefore, they have come sorrowing and repenting; in him they trust for pardon and acceptance with God; they can find rest for their souls no where but in God's peace through him, know the great mercy of it, and how dearly it was purchased for them, and fear nothing so much as to lose it; and therefore they keep their eyes steadily fixed upon the holiness as well as forgiveness of the covenant, and have but one great wish for themselves, that they may "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Tell me that you are in such a work as this, though it be yet only in a lower degree, and I can tell you, for your comfort, that you are in a state of salvation, and in Christ's way of life. On the other hand, think, I beseech you, what horrible mockery it is to say to God, "Grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy holy Spirit," when you have no knowledge or belief of your undone state by nature, of your danger and misery in sin, and of the necessity of being brought into a new condition with God by forgiveness, and enabled to live to him in holiness; or to say, "you believe in the Holy Ghost the Comforter," when, in the bottom of your hearts, you desire none of his comforts, choose to live

only to and for the world, and have not the least experience in yourselves of his work of power in "turning you from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that you may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ;" Acts, xxvi. 18. My brethren, would you have me tell you that this is being in a state of grace and salvation? I dare not. It is my office to hold up the truth to you; to tell you, as I am able, what God is, what Christ is, what sin is, what a work of the Spirit is; to call, to awaken, to persuade you; to convince you, if it pleases God, of the blindness and certain ruin of a natural or unconverted state, on the one hand, and of the light, peace, and blessed hope of a state of grace, on the other; but if you will not hear me, I have nothing else to preach or deliver to you, and your blood must be upon your heads.

Let me therefore exhort you, from what has been said at this time, to look into yourselves, and consider what your state is; whether it is a state of nature, in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief, or a state of grace, in what the apostle here calls a marvellous light. Heaven opened to us as our hope and inheritance, and the light of heaven shining in our souls to conduct us to it; the light of truth and holiness, light in the head, light in the heart; the Spirit's light, to see God, to see Christ, to see ourselves, to see our sin, death in it, and salvation from it: is not this indeed a marvellous light, and a mighty change for poor sinners, lying in darkness and the shadow of death? You might have some faint conception of it, if you would think of a man who had lain many years in a deep dungeon, and was brought out all at once into full daylight. And what else can St. Peter mean, by saying, that Christians are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people?" It is not

easy to raise our thoughts to the height of these expressions, but you must needs think it a glorious, happy thing, to be persuaded on good grounds that they belong to us. They do, as sure as we are believers; and if Christ is precious to you, you may go home rejoicing in the comfort of them. I say, think it worth your pains to bring the matter under examination. What do your thoughts run much upon? what is uppermost in your hearts, and the great design you are carrying on in the world? And if you do pray, what is the burden of your prayers? Is it for mercy, and strength to keep it? Is it to hate sin, and love holiness more? Is it to be kept by the mighty power of God unto salvation? Do your wills, do your hearts pray for this? And do you "desire the sincere milk of the word, as new-born babes, that ye may grow thereby?" Then you have faith, then you have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," then you are called out of darkness into the marvellous light of Christ. You know him to be the pearl of great price; you see the difference between Christ and sin, between Christ and the world, between Christ and your own works, between life and death, time and eternity, and have the grace given you to choose what God chooses for you. On the other hand, if you know or think little of Christ; if he has not opened your eyes to see sin, and the necessity of his death for it; if he has no right in you, nor power over you, to set you in the way of God's commandments, and keep you to your vow in baptism; if you do not greatly esteem his salvation, and thank God for him, and dread above all things to lose your portion in him; I beseech you, know your state, and pray to God to make you sensible of it. Do not deny it, nor frame excuses for continuing as you are, but make haste and escape for your lives; for notwithstanding your Christian name and appearance in this place, you are in a state of darkness,

without God, without Christ, without faith, and the life of faith; though not without hope, if you will turn to the light which is offered you. And if it pleases God that you should find all is wrong with you, and come before him with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart, as you have often said you did, without knowledge or meaning; let me advise you not to think of making your peace with him, by any humblings or repentings of your own without Christ; for "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," Acts, iv. 12; no way or means for sinful man to be reconciled to God but by faith in Christ, taking away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Repent you must sincerely, and do works meet for repentance; but if you think that nothing else is to be done, or that any thing you can do will atone for your sins, and make satisfaction to the justice of God, you are still unbelievers, and as much out of the way of salvation as ever. It is true, we would fain have it so, from a vain conceit of our own doings, and our low, false notions of the purity of God, the strictness of his law, and the sinfulness of sin; and the only thing which can help us, Christ's blood, is the last we often fly to, and many never. But I have spoken in vain, if you do not understand that no outward form of religion, no beneficence, or exercise of humanity, no kind of behaviour or character, how decent and respectable soever, can be substituted in the room of the one sole remedy of God's providing, and which is alike wanted by every son and daughter of Adam. Let all such know, that if they do not look for justification by Christ, and make him the foundation of their acceptance with God, he will disdain all their works and services, find sin in the very best things they do, and reject them as they do Christ. Let this then be done; let Jesus be to you what he came into the world for, and his name imports, your Saviour, "made

of God unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30; doing the will of God for your salvation, which he alone could do, purchasing your peace, and saving you from the second death by his own sweat and blood. Oh! do this, pray for this, turn the eye of your soul this way; look with penitence and faith on him who was pierced by you and for you, that you may love him, and he may live in you; do this, and you will be the children of God's family and kingdom now, "born again not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever," 1 Pet. i. 23; and, hereafter, joint heirs with Christ in his glory.

May that word written by his inspired apostle, and now brought to your remembrance by me, be sounded into your hearts by the same Spirit which gave it, and stir you up to secure the blessedness of it to yourselves. "*Ye*," says he, speaking to all true believers, faithful Christians, and no other, "are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

SERMON XXV.

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. 1 Pet. ii. 10.

In the ten first verses of this chapter, St. Peter distinctly mentions the faith and practice of Christians, the privileges they enjoy, the hope they are made partakers of, the new and happy state they are called to, by being the people of God. Having "tasted that the Lord is gra-

cious," being grounded in the faith of his love, and "coming to Christ as unto a living stone, they also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices," their prayers, their praises, their hearts, their wills, their purest and best obedience, "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. To them that believe he is precious" in all respects, as their atonement and righteousness, the restorer of their natures to holiness, their resurrection and life, their Mediator and Advocate with God. And in the sense of his blessings, which are dearer to them than all the world, they strike at the root of sin in the heart, by "laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings, as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby;" study to approve themselves to God as his children in every thought, word, and deed; and endeavour as much as possible to "show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." All which the apostle sums up in the text, which is the conclusion of the first part of his epistle from the beginning to this verse; in which, having set before them the blessedness of believers in such high expressions as they would never have presumed to think of without his warrant and authority, namely, that they were "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people;" he closes the whole with bringing their past and present state into one view; that, upon a comparison of one with the other, what they had been and what they were, they might with him bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the happy change which had been wrought in their condition; for that "in time past they were not a people, but now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now," says he, "have obtained mercy." Upon hearing the words, you must needs take notice of the great dif-

ference between the two states mentioned in them; how desirable it is on one hand to be of the number of God's people, how dreadful on the other not to obtain mercy. I shall endeavour to recommend them to your careful observation, and assist you in the improvement of them,

I. By showing the happy condition of the people of God.

II. By what means we attain to this state, and how we may assure ourselves that we are in it.

III. The necessity of our being brought into it.

O Lord! help me, for it is a great thing I am to speak of,—thy salvation, thy Christ, thy Spirit, thy kingdom of grace opened in our hearts as the only way to thy kingdom of glory. Have mercy on us, and be our guide unto death. Make thy word the savour of life to every one in this congregation, and bring us before thee with earnest unceasing prayer, to "see the felicity of thy chosen, and rejoice in the gladness of thy people."

I. I am to show the happy condition of the people of God.

It is implied and expressed in the very word "people." As the people of any country are entitled to the privileges of it, enjoy the benefit of its laws, and think themselves happy under a wise and just government; in like manner, the people of God, as separated from the rest of mankind to a state of professed subjection and obedience to him as their Lord and Governor, are under his immediate care and inspection, owned by him as his people in a manner which others are not, and entitled to his peculiar blessings and favours. It is true, his kingdom ruleth over all, and all in common enjoy the benefits of his providence and universal dominion; for

"he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust;" Matt. v. 45. The air we breathe, the bread we eat, are his gifts to all without distinction; every creature lives continually upon his bounty, is wholly at his disposal, and supported every moment by his will. And farther, as he made us for the knowledge of himself, he has an eye to this in all his dealings with us, and "would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth;" 1 Tim. ii. 4. He now calls you to it, that he may be your God and Father, and you may rejoice in the happy state of his children. But if you despise this mercy, and do not choose to have your portion in him, here is plain intimation given you that you do not belong to him as his immediate subjects and servants, and therefore have no share in the blessings of his peculiar people. Do you ask what those blessings are? All that you can suppose a gracious God has in store for those whom he loves and favours. The riches of his grace, the joy of his promises, all manner of blessings exactly suited to their needs, the blessings of time, the blessings of eternity; deliverance from the worst of all evils, and the greatest of all fears, from the power of sin reigning in them as a nature, and from damnation, the desert of sin; peace and good will, perfect reconciliation, and a right to draw nigh to him as children to a father; protection and comfort in life, support in death, and both in life and death "a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them;" 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. Being "born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the word of God," 1 Pet. i. 23, they are begotten to the power of an endless life; and though they must pay the debt of nature, and die like other men, it is only to be freed for ever from

sin, pain, and sorrow, and to enter upon those joys which are prepared for them; for "their life is hid with Christ in God," bound up in his life, quickened by the same Spirit which declared him to be the Son of God, and raised him from the dead; and in virtue of their union with him, "when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory;" Col. iii. 3, 4. Behold the portion of God's people, and those who have obtained mercy; what they believe in, and come to him for, and are sure to receive at his hands; though, at the same time, it must be confessed that this is the very thing which frights the greatest part of mankind from him. If his blessings are the comforts of a soul, and the riches he bestows upon his children and favoured people are spiritual, or future, this is a kind of happiness for which the men of the world have no relish, and therefore resolve to seek it in other things. Certain, I say, it is, that the natural unenlightened man, whether vicious, careless, or altogether worldly, neither covets nor knows them, and that they are downright foolishness to him. But nevertheless God reveals them to you, proposes them to your choice, courts you with the offer of them, and would gladly stir you up to desire them for yourselves, because he knows you must be undone for ever in the want of them; and he can make them look as lovely in our eyes as once they were mean and contemptible. But I beseech you, before we refuse them, let us consider a little further what they are. God, we may be sure, will take care of those whom he owns for his people, and provide effectually for their well-being and happiness. And the way to do this, he knows, is not to leave them to judge for themselves, what he ought to do, and what is good for them; but he tells them what is so, and puts it in their power; and if they will not choose what he chooses for them, he cannot depart from his own wisdom, nor be

so much their enemy as to alter his purpose. What is necessary for them, and suited to their wants, that he will do, and nothing else. If they are in darkness, he will call them into his marvellous light: if they are in the way of death, he will show them how to come out of it: if they are deservedly under his curse, he will have mercy on them, and remove it from them; but cannot suffer them to continue in it without giving them warning of their danger, and offering them his help. See now what God does and will do for his people; what they are by putting themselves into his hands, and what you should wish for yourselves if your eyes were opened to discern between good and evil. If you were taken captive by an enemy, bound hand and foot, and without any means of relief in your power, you know what would be deliverance to you in this condition. If you were sick of a deadly distemper, you would wish for a cure; if you were under a sentence of death for any crime you had committed, you would joyfully accept a pardon. But what is this to the sentence of eternal death we are under, to the natural corruption which holds us in it, to the sin which brings it upon us, cleaves to our souls and bodies, and leads us blindfold into the pit of destruction? And yet such is our unhappy condition, till the mercy of God meets with us; such is the deliverance he works for us, and, with all the kindness and compassion of a father for his perishing children, invites us to accept of. And if this, in every particular of it, is the state of mankind before they have obtained mercy; if we are all without exception blind, sinful, condemned, and helpless; you must perceive at once, that recovery from it is the very thing we want, and the greatest blessing which can be vouchsafed us. Consider these words of Christ—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the

broken-hearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord;" Luke, iv. 18, 19. What a melancholy account is this of Satan's kingdom in the world, and of the hard bondage in which he holds the miserable sons of Adam! What a poor slave would be in the dungeon of a prison, galled and bruised with the weight of his chains, and without the least glimmering of light, that we are, one and all, in respect of our spiritual condition. Sin hath cast us into prison, loaded us with heavy chains, and covered us with darkness as much as if our eyes were put out; and there we are, bound over to death, till God's time comes for our deliverance, expressed here by "the acceptable year of the Lord;" which is an allusion to the year of jubilee among the Jews, when all debtors and servants, by the law of Moses, were to be released. You may refuse all your lives to see yourselves in this light; but it is an exact picture of our natural state, if Christ knew what was, and what he came into the world to do. As sure as we are born, we are in sin, blind in sin, and under a sentence of condemnation for sin; and if you ask a proof of this, you may easily find it in yourselves. I beseech you, observe; the most high God acquaints us with his will, spreads his law before us, says positively, This thou shalt do, this thou shalt not do, and we break through all restraints, and venture to disobey him: what is this but sin? And why are we so prone to disobey him, and trample upon his authority, but because we are corrupt in the deep ground of our natures, and have a law in our members warring against the law of God? Take notice again that we are as blind as corrupt; we do not see sin where it is, nor hardly the guilt of any sin. Though the Scripture is as full and clear in the point as possible; though we learn from

thence that one sin of the first man brought death into the world, and know by woful experience that every child of man dies for it; though, besides the sentence we are under for Adam's sin, we have innumerable transgressions of our own to answer for, and cannot but understand that sin is the same, and God the same now that they were then; yet it is hidden from us as much as ever, and we will not be persuaded of its deadly nature, God's hatred of it, and will to punish it: what can this be but utter blindness? And if God is just, and true to his word, what can the result be but condemnation? Blessed be God, he can and will release us from it; he does deliver many, and has always a people in the earth. He is now waiting to be gracious to every one of you; and whatever your sin is, present blindness in it, or slavery to it, you may obtain mercy from the Lord, and experience a happy alteration of your condition. And a great deliverance and a happy change you must needs think it, to have your eyes opened to see the power that sin has in you, together with the curse which attends it, and then to be freed from it. If there is such a thing upon earth as being the people of God, and some are not so, you must needs be full of thought to which of these two sorts you belong; you must be dead to all consideration, if you do not see blessing unspeakable on one hand, and nothing but danger and misery on the other. I am telling you what that danger is, and how great the misery of such a condition, on purpose that you may avoid it, and resolve without delay to have your portion with the people of God. Bethink yourselves, and do not wilfully shut your eyes against the light. Not a people! Why then you are the very persons this day and hour whom Christ speaks of, spirits in prison, lying in darkness and the shadow of death. You are without God in the world; whatever you are doing in it, whether you gain or lose,

rich or poor, getting up and lying down, you are under his curse, and he beholds you continually as his enemies, and vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. When the first man had forfeited all right to the favour of God by his one act of disobedience, he relieved him from the dread he was under, and raised his drooping spirits, by telling him, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head;" Gen. iii. 15, that is, undo the unhappy effects of his sin, and work a great deliverance for him and his posterity; but in this you have no share. You choose to continue in death; and that very sentence which God pronounced upon him is still in force against you, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," i. e. he should be liable to eternal death. For the sentence of bodily death was executed upon him, notwithstanding the promise which God had given him; and therefore the meaning of that promise must necessarily be, that if he accepted mercy, he should not die eternally. Will you not accept it? Will you die eternally? Not a people! Then sin is unknown, unfelt, and unfeared. Then it has dominion over you. Then you are the children and people of the wicked one, and death will deliver you up to him as his right for ever. See, I say, what you are on the wrong side of your work which God has given you to do in the world. Deal no longer deceitfully with your souls. It is a dreadful thing to be unconcerned for them, whatever it is that hinders you, or to be always mistaken about our state, however it happens. Think well, think over and over again, what it is to be a people. The people of God! "Happy," sure, "are the people that are in such a case, yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God;" Psalm cxliv. 15; blessed in their going out and coming in, blessed in all they do. Those, I mean, who, when the question is put to the soul, what they esteem their treasure, and covet as their portion,

can answer at once, The Lord and his goodness. We all know that he is every man's best friend, and none can be so senseless as not to own it; and that the best thing we can do for ourselves is to make him so, by taking him for our God; but this is sooner said than done. And yet the text has no blessing for us till we both think and say it unfeignedly. For God's people is a willing people. If they are so at all, it is by their own consent and free choice; and there is no idol in their hearts which they bow down to more than him, nothing in the world which they prefer to his favour. These are the blessed of the Lord. His nature, his will, his word and promises, are all engaged for their security, that they shall never lose what they have set their hearts upon, never be disappointed of their hope, and that "all things shall work together for their good;" Rom. viii. 28. Prosperity or adversity, health or sickness, the frowns or favour of the world, the good things of life which corrupt, the crosses which fret and gall the spirits of other men, are thankfully received, or well endured, and nothing shall by any means hurt them. For why? they are the people of God; and whatever comes to them from his hand cannot but be intended for their good, is dispensed to them with unerring wisdom, with all the kindness of a never-failing friend, and all the love of an indulgent father. They know they may trust all their concerns in his hands, and lie down in peace, having an eye watching over them which never sleeps, and almighty power to guard them. And, what is the crown of all, they can meet death, if not wholly without fear, yet with a well grounded hope, and look beyond it to that happy time when they shall sin and sorrow no more, be freed from all their wants, and put in possession of all their wishes. For this is the great end of God in taking them for his people, and the great end which they have in view in

taking him for their God. He intends nothing less for them than himself, and their eyes are ever looking to him, and their hearts chiefly fixed upon the future, everlasting enjoyment of him. Comforts they have in hand, peculiar to themselves, and what others know nothing of; but these they do not regard as their portion from him, but leave it to him to give or take away as he pleases. Whilst they are in the world, they must partake of the common lot of mankind, be sick, grieve for the miseries which are in the world, and for the loss of friends, suffer, and die at last. Nay, God sometimes finds hard work for his people, and puts them to extraordinary trials. And they are not stocks and stones, they must feel the load he lays upon them; and happy enough they are in seeing the use of suffering, but they must not expect to be without it. The world is the world to them as well as others, "vanity and vexation of spirit;" and they must say, as Jacob, one of the most favoured of men, did, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." You see I do not overrate the happiness of God's people, as if it was a state of perfect freedom from all trouble; for this would be leading you into a mistake, and there is no such thing upon earth. Though I am verily persuaded that they have more quietness, peace of mind, and true enjoyment in the world, than others, and pass better through it in all respects, yet they will feel more or less of Adam's curse in it, and have frequent occasion to be convinced that their rest is not here. And if in the main they did not make little account of the world, and of every thing in it, they would be no better in God's eyes than other men. Heaven is their home and their hope, and eternity their support; and if it was not their belief, desire, and expectation, they would not be the people of God. For the character of all such is, that "they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."

And what follows these words, Heb. ix. 16, is very remarkable; WHEREFORE, because they are so persuaded, and so minded, "God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city." The Scripture says still more—they are come to it already. As being God's people, they are members of his family and kingdom, invested with all the privileges, and entitled to all the blessings of it. He sees them in it, and belonging to it now, while they are upon earth; and they rejoice in the belief of it themselves, though the glory of it is hidden from them. The words I have to mention to you, as a full proof of the happy, happy condition of God's people, are written Heb. xii. 22—24, and contain a great deal more than I have said or can say to you of it. With them I shall conclude this head; and oh! that God would seal the instruction and comfort of them to your hearts, and set your souls on fire for the blessedness of believers. Hear the words: "But ye are come" —observe, it is not said, ye *shall*, but ye *are* come— "unto Mount Sion"—as Mount Sion was the seat of God's worship to his people the Jews, here he dwelt in his temple, it is here put to signify the place where his covenanted people, all living Christians, meet together in spirit now, and will come together hereafter in glory— "and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born"— God's heirs—"which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel"—crieth louder in the ears of God for mercy, than that of Abel did, or all our sins do, for vengeance. "See," says the apostle, "that ye refuse not him that speaketh." And of him, the Lord

Jesus, and the sprinkling of his blood, I am to speak under the next head.

II. I am to show by what means we attain to the happy state of God's people, and how we may assure ourselves that we are in it.

But first let me tell you, that the people of God know as certainly how they attain to this state, as that they are his people. And I wish you would take notice of this, and consider how vain a thing it is for any to think they have obtained mercy, when they never sought after it, and neither know what it is, nor why they want it, nor in what way it comes to them. St. Peter, speaking of Christians, says, they "have tasted that the Lord is gracious;" they have "come to Christ as unto a living stone, that they also as lively stones might be built up a spiritual house; that he is precious to them that believe; that they are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people." But how can any of these things be said of those, who not only live in great ignorance of them, but plead their ignorance as what they think will excuse them before God? How can Christ be precious to them, when, for want of knowing what he is, and what he has to do for them, they must necessarily be without concern about their interest in him, and can possibly have no value for him or his benefits? My brethren, if you would be willing to know the truth of your condition, it might be the beginning of salvation to you. But if those who are not a people, will go on blindly presuming that they are, in spite of reason and Scripture, there is no hope of their ever being so. I pray God open your hearts to attend to the word, while I show how and by what means we become the people of God.

The answer of Scripture is, "We are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" Gal. iii. 26. "We are

by nature children of wrath," Eph. ii. 3; fallen from God in our first father into a state of death, abominable in his sight, as being ourselves corrupt and sinful, and must perish for ever if we are not discharged from condemnation, accounted righteous, and restored to his favour. And there was no other method of reconciling sinful man to his Maker, no way or means to effect this great alteration in our condition, but by the merits and death of Christ, there being "no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;" Acts, iv. 12. He therefore was appointed of God, and willingly offered himself, not only to be crucified for our sins, and pay the debt we owed to divine justice, but to work out a perfect righteousness for us, that we might stand as clear of all blame before God as if we had never sinned, and be accepted to the reward of eternal life. So we obtain mercy, so we become the people of God, by what Christ has done and suffered for us, and by our faith in it. And to show you what faith is, and how we come to it, I here ask the question, which your own consciences cannot but answer truly, Was any part of this your work? Did you make your own peace with God? Did you reverse the sentence of death which was gone out against you, and open for yourselves a way into heaven? Did you satisfy offended almighty justice, or pay a perfect obedience in your own persons to the law, of which it is said, that "one jot or one title shall in no wise pass from it," not the least part of it shall ever be dispensed with, or righteousness imputed to man, "till all be fulfilled?" Matt. v. 18. No; but Jesus did. He took our nature upon him, that in it and for it he might fulfil all righteousness, and present it spotless to God. He suffered death in our stead, not to save us from the necessity of dying out of this world, but that we might not die into hell. By his obedience unto death, he

"finished the work which the Father gave him to do, he bore the curse of our sins in his own body," was made "the Lord our righteousness, and perfected for ever them that are sanctified," namely, "by his one offering of himself;" John, xvii. 4; 1 Pet. ii. 24; Jer. xxiii. 6; Heb. x. 14. He came down from heaven to work this great salvation for us; he was appointed to the office of redeeming us, because no other could be found in earth or heaven who was capable of undertaking it; and hard work it was even for him to sustain the weight of it. Think of this, I beseech you; consider what was to be done before the sin of the world could be taken away, and then you will clearly understand to whom we are indebted for it, and that we could possibly have no share in it. No salvation by our own works, says St. Paul over and over again; and I am often putting you in mind of this, because it is a most weighty and fundamental point of belief, and unless you are well grounded in it, Christ can be nothing to you but "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence." You will put yourselves, and your own miserable unworthiness, in his stead; you will make lame work of your repentance, if you ever think of it at all; you will mistake God, mistake sin, mistake holiness, and every thing belonging to salvation. God is just, and man is sinful, and "the wages of sin is death;" Rom. vi. 23. The work, therefore, we have to do, is either to live without sin, or to revoke that sentence. We can do neither; we could as soon make a world, or pull God from his throne; and you see at once how desperate our case would be if we were left to ourselves, to make our peace with God by any will, work, or endeavours of our own. But when we have gained this point of knowledge, that deliverance is not of ourselves, we can understand what faith is, and betake ourselves to the rock of our salvation. We can then see that there is no other possible way of

becoming the children and people of God, than by obtaining mercy, venturing our souls upon Christ, and pleading what he has done and suffered for our present peace and eternal justification. "In him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins," Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14; through him we are received to the adoption of sons; for his sake we are beloved of God, and heirs of the riches of his grace; in him accepted, and saved from first to last. As he did what we could not, and all he did was for our sakes, it is all ours whenever we receive him into our hearts, as "of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" 1 Cor. i. 30. But who are they that believe all this, and rejoice in the comfort of it? Not the impenitent; in which I reckon not only the openly dissolute and profane, but all those who never saw the guilt of sin, and their condition in sin. Let them be what they will in other respects, they cannot look out for a remedy till they know their want of it; they cannot possibly fly to Christ as their refuge, till they are convinced that nothing else can relieve them. Not those who will not resign themselves to his teaching and government, or disregard the holiness he requires of us. Whatever pretences they make to faith are groundless, dishonourable to Christ, and a cheat upon themselves. None but those who, having come to him to be washed from their sins in his blood, are as willing to forsake them, think themselves bound to walk by his rule, endeavour, as God shall enable them, to be holy in all manner of conversation, and strike at the root of sin in the heart. So closely does one thing follow another in our salvation by Christ; and if you leave out any part of it, you lose him altogether, for he will not be divided. If you have been brought to faith in him by the knowledge of sin, and a true work of repentance, you will not desire to retain it;

and if you did, you can never think it safe to continue in it, when you see God's vengeance against it, and how severely it was punished in the person of Christ. If you know what he has done and suffered for you, by a faith of the Spirit's working, you will love him; and if you love him, you will study to show it in the way he so earnestly and repeatedly requires of you, by keeping his commandments. That our salvation is Christ's work, and not our own, is the great foundation of our hope, and must never be questioned. But then our own holiness is a necessary part of his salvation; and though we cannot be saved for it, yet if we are not renewed by him to the desire and love of it, here is full proof against us that nothing is done, and that if we have not the faith which worketh by love, and purifieth the heart, we have none at all. For as sure as we belong to Christ, "we are God's workmanship, created in him unto good works, which God hath before ordained," or for which he hath fitted and prepared us, namely, by faith in Christ Jesus, "that we should live in them;" Eph. ii. 10.

If you should ask how faith is wrought in us, whether all at once, by an extraordinary gift, or in a more ordinary way, by a gradual operation of the Spirit, assisting and enlightening our minds in reading, hearing, and meditating on the word? I would answer, that instances of the former kind there are several in Scripture, as Matthew and other apostles, Paul, Cornelius, Lydia, the jailor. And what has been may be, and I believe really is, for reasons best known to God, in every time and place where the Gospel is preached. But then it is a great error, very disquieting to many of the children of God, and must by no means be maintained, that there is no other way of coming to faith but in an instant, with a clear knowledge of the way in which it is brought to us. For, generally speaking, it is not so, but more a work of time, in the

use of means, and in different persons in different degrees. And certain it is, that we receive Christ with all his benefits, when we depend only upon him for peace with God, and walk with him, as all his servants and followers do, in a purpose of obedience. I say, if we hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which is given us in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, trusting in him as our Mediator and Advocate with God, and conforming to his rule, certain it is that our faith is saving; and we should be great enemies to ourselves if we questioned the soundness of it, or entertained the least doubt whether we can "say that Jesus is the Lord by the Holy Ghost." And let it be assuredly believed, that "no man can say it but by the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor. xii. 3; a point which must by no means be forgotten, or lightly passed over, when we are considering how and by what means we become the people of God. For without him we can do nothing, neither understand, nor repent, nor believe, to the saving of the soul; and whatever we do will be a fruitless labour, and of no value in the sight of God, if he is not working at the root of it. He is the gift of the Father and the Son to us, appointed and sent in Christ's stead, to begin, carry on, and complete the work of our redemption. We say in the Nicene Creed, that we believe in him as "the Author and Giver of life," or the quickener of our spirits to a new state of grace and holiness, in the manner described John, xvi. by reproving and convincing us of sin, revealing Christ to us for righteousness, and judging the prince of this world, that is, the devil, by casting him out of the possession he has gotten in our hearts. By him, therefore, we are brought to repentance, grafted into Christ for all his benefits, live worthy of our high calling, are supported, strengthened, and comforted in every part of our Christian progress. By him taking possession of us, and, as it were, lying

down with us in our graves, we shall be raised from the dead; and if he does not dwell in us, we shall rise indeed by the power of God to condemnation, but not by the Spirit of God to life everlasting. I said before, that he lives and acts in us as he pleases. He came to the apostles at the day of Pentecost visibly and forcibly, as well as others afterwards, whom we read of in Scripture; and he never tied up his hands from acting upon some at all times in a way of extraordinary grace. Nay, it is the way in which he manifests himself to the world from time to time, to keep alive the belief of him, and to the awakening of many souls to seek after his influences, besides those who are the immediate subjects of them; though not to prescribe a method to him, or look for his help exactly in the same way and manner in which it has been vouchsafed to others; for he "divideth to every man severally as he will," 1 Cor. xii. 11, and his operations, for the most part, are in secret. He enlightens our understandings, renews our wills and affections, and governs in our souls, in the sanctified use of means, and in the right application of our own reason, as assisted and directed by him. Whatever is done to purpose in religion, he is the doer of it, and our souls can no more be alive unto God without him than the body can live without the soul. But what can it signify to those who never put themselves into his hands, in what way he acts and moves us? One thing is certain, that they themselves are blind, and, whatever their outward form and appearance is, strangers to his operations. The grace of God they are not made partakers of, and it is well if they do not despise and deride the agency of the Holy Ghost. The "things of God they receive not;" they are either too obstinate in wickedness to seek after them, or too wise and good in their own conceits to acknowledge their want of them.

We may now, from what has been said, collect the answer to the inquiry proposed under this head, by what means we attain to the state mentioned in the text, and also, how we may assure ourselves that we are in it? I shall give it you in few words; and happy will you be, if your hearts can bear witness to it.

By Christ, and not by any work or sufficiency of our own, we obtain mercy to become the people of God.

Our trust in him for remission of sins, and acceptance with God, is the faith by which we are saved.

This faith is by a spiritual discernment of our want of Christ for salvation, and of his all-sufficiency to save us.

And, lastly, wherever it is a spiritual work, it begins in repentance, carries us on to holiness, and proves itself to our consciences by the sincerity of our obedience.

Leave out this last, and you have nothing but a dead faith, and miserably deceive yourselves, if you hope well of your state. To keep your peace with God, there must be an unfeigned hearty purpose of obedience; and if there is such a purpose, there will be a progress in it. The wise and well-disposed are too apt to slumber and sleep, and the best may fall by temptation; but if they do not rise again from it, recover their purpose, and return to their duty, they are lost for ever. For the people of God, as sure as they are so, are renewed to the desire and love of holiness, "show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light" by the purity of their conversation, and esteem it no small part of their happiness under him, that they can serve him with freedom of spirit. St. Peter will not suffer you to deceive yourselves in this matter. He tells you, that "as new-born babes, you must desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." It is the food appointed of God for the preservation and

nourishment of your new life; and if you have no appetite for it, it is certain you are not quickened to that life. Do you, or do you not, desire to feed upon it, for growth in grace and holiness? Try yourselves here. If you would persuade yourselves, upon good grounds, that the end you are aiming at is to be of the number of God's people, see that you be diligent in the use of those helps and means, without which you cannot reasonably hope to obtain it. Do not be so foolish as to think you can have any assurance of the goodness of your state, without a life of godliness, or that there can be a godly life, without the actions which are proper to it, and fitted to produce and maintain it. Reading and hearing the word of God is one of them. Again, are the blessings therein brought to your knowledge, and offered to your acceptance, not worth praying for? Do you pretend to believe that a great salvation has been wrought for you, and that you must be miserable for ever, if you are not made partakers of it, and can you be so unconcerned about it, as not to ask it of God, and make it the burden of all your prayers? especially, when you know that he has made your asking the condition of receiving? "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;" (Matt. vii. 7.) if you ask, seek, and knock, truly and earnestly, and not otherwise. And surely, if you were believers, your own sense of the greatness of the benefits to be obtained, and your great want of them, would drive you to prayer, if God had not called you to it. Your hearts would ask; they would say more to God than your tongues can, and you would be forward and willing of yourselves to all kinds of prayer; prayer in public, prayer in secret, prayer with your families. Nothing would be neglected which you know to be necessary for carrying on your great design of obtaining and keeping mercy; no means of God's

appointing for your establishment in the faith and growth in grace, would be slighted, not the sacrament of the Lord's supper. It could not be, if you were alive unto God, and had any real, affecting sense of your salvation from the curse of sin and eternal misery by the death of Christ. You will take notice, that I mention these outward things, to help you in the trial of your state. The question is, how you may assure yourselves that you are in a state of grace and salvation? And the answer is, by your faith, and the life of faith; when you know first, that you have come repenting and sorrowing to Christ, as your Saviour from the guilt and condemnation of sin; and then give up yourselves to be taught and governed by him, and maintain a Christian walk with him, in all such ways as he has appointed for the security and increase of your faith and holiness. Can you think and call yourselves Christians, and be content to live, as too many do, in the neglect or careless performance of public worship? Can you be the servants and people of God, without a diligent, conscientious study of his word, without prayer, in private and with your families? Can you be the disciples of Christ, without a high value and esteem for the blessed sacrament of his body and blood; in which you are called upon to remember the sacrifice of his death, the necessity of it, the love there was in it, and the obligation it lays you under to live unto him that died for you? Let these things bear witness against you, as marks of an unregenerate state; and I say again, do not think there can be a godly and a Christian life, without the actions of it, or a diligent use of those helps and means, which are the signs of it, and as necessary for the nourishment and well-being of the soul, as our food is for the support of the bodily life. I do not mean that the greatest exactness in an outward form of religion is of itself a sufficient proof of the soundness of any man's

state; for it may be counterfeited, and, by a great mistake, is too frequently substituted in the room of real conversion, or grace in the heart. But wherever there is true religion, it will necessarily show itself in all such acts and exercises as are suitable to a religious state, as being the way in which we draw nigh to God, the means of deriving a blessing from God to our souls, and strictly required of us as the duties we owe him. It would be strange, indeed, if we could be "a chosen generation," without any degree of zeal in the worship of God; "a royal priesthood," without any duties and services to offer up to him; "a holy nation," without an appearance of holiness; "a peculiar people," without any difference of religious behaviour from the rest of the world. If, therefore, we would be the people of God, and have the comfort of knowing it, let us lay Christ for the foundation of our hope toward God, let us take him for the Lord our righteousness, and make him the anchor of our souls, and only refuge from the guilt that is upon us; that, believing and rejoicing in God our Saviour, we may present him with the obedience of our hearts, and make it appear to the world, and to ourselves, that we belong to him, both by the regularity of our behaviour in his service, and the holiness of our lives and conversations. So we shall keep our faith, live in hope, and die in peace.

III. I am to show the necessity of our attaining to the happy state of God's people.

It is just a matter of the same necessity as it is to be saved. It is the very thing which Christ came into the world to accomplish in the souls of those whom he saves, what he wrought his miracles for, the end for which he died upon the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended

into heaven. And he hath left us his will for this purpose in writing, appointed his servants under him upon earth to explain and enforce it, and is always with us in the power of the Holy Ghost to preach it to our hearts; and all to the end we may be brought into the happy state of God's people, rejoice in the mercy of our deliverance from sin, death, and hell, and make it the chief end of our living to secure to ourselves so great a benefit. And what I have farther to say to you upon this head, is only this one thing, that if you are not stirred up effectually to seek after the grace of God, and the salvation which is by Christ, if you do not come to him in repentance, and know him now by faith as your Saviour, and live unto him by his rule, you perish for ever. Conversion from a dead state in sin, wretched ignorance, or the cares of a worldly life to the neglect of the soul, conversion, I say, is the point; the opening of your eyes, the turning of your wills, to the acknowledgment of God and of Christ, this is the work which the Spirit has to do in you, and must, of all necessity, be carefully and strictly attended to as your work under him. What we could not possibly do, Christ has done for us. We had no blood to pour out for the remission of sins, no righteousness to offer to God, no counsel, might, or will, for the redemption of our souls. He alone could pay the price of it; he alone could take up our sins, bear the whole weight of divine vengeance against them, and blot them for ever out of God's book by the blood of his cross. He alone could fulfil all righteousness, and put it into our hands to appear with before God. And all he requires of us for what he has done and suffered on our behalf is, that we would acknowledge the desert of our sins, thankfully accept the mercy he has obtained for us, and, in the sense of his love, bind ourselves to his service, and return to our obedience. Do this, and I can tell you, in

the name of Christ, that you shall live; refuse this offer, and mercy is at an end with you. Why, he says it himself: "He that believeth" in Christ for the remission of sins, "and is baptized," or by the rite of baptism solemnly owns his belief, and obliges himself to live suitably to it, "shall be saved." Again he says, "he that believeth not" that sin must be forgiven, can be forgiven only through Christ, and is forgiven that it may be forsaken, "shall be damned;" Mark, xvi. 16. And what I am now advising you to consider, and be well aware of, is, that mercy does not consist, as I fear you think, in receiving the impenitent and unbelieving to pardon, or overlooking the sins they live in, and make light of; but in providing such a remedy for us, in our undone state, as we could not provide for ourselves, and may choose or not; but which can be of no benefit to any, till they receive it in the love thereof, and, in the belief of it, turn from the world to God, from sin to holiness. Christ said to the blind man, "Go, and wash in the pool of Siloam; and he went, and washed, and came seeing;" John, ix. 7. Do you think he would have received his sight if he had not gone? He says to you, "Repent, and believe the Gospel." This is his salvation; he has told us all, in few words, what we must do for our recovery, and has no other means in reserve to help us out in case of wilful neglect. And can you think to be saved without repentance and faith, and "bringing forth fruits meet for repentance?" It does not become me to set bounds to mercy. Blessed be God, it is infinite, and has operated on our behalf, far beyond what we could conceive. But then it is most dangerous presumption to take it to ourselves, in opposition to the declared will of God; and it would be doing unspeakable injury to your souls, not to tell you faithfully what that will is. And I now, therefore, tell you, with the same earnestness and

sincerity as if they were the last words I should ever speak to you, that as Christ reconciles us to God, and makes us his people, so the mercy we obtain through him works to obedience and purity of heart, and can only be effectual to us by our living as his people, and fashioning ourselves according to his word.

And now, dearly beloved, I would exhort you by all your hopes to consider and lay to heart these words of St. Peter: "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." Once not a people, but now the people of God, is a blessed change in the condition of sinners. For the people of God are dear to him now as the children of his own bowels, the purchase of Christ's blood, the living temples of the Holy Ghost, and will be his people for ever and ever. Now not a people! Oh! the wretchedness of such a state, beyond what words can describe! to repeat the Lord's prayer with a lie in your mouths, when you say, "Our Father," to have no share in Christ, not to be quickened by the Spirit, to lose your baptism, to have heaven shut against you: can you bear to think of this? And what hinders you from putting the question to yourselves with great seriousness, and godly concern — Am I one of God's people, or am I not? have I obtained mercy, or have I not? If you have, then you know what sin is, that none but Christ could save you from it; and you are endeavouring for his sake, and in the fear of God, to put the accursed thing from you. Then you read the Scripture, to know what the will of God is; then you are in a state of prayer that you may do it, and walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. Then if you were to be asked, What is the pearl of great price, and the joy and treasure of your hearts? you could answer at once, Christ and his salvation.

Then you know either that you have always kept close to God, and to your vow in baptism, fighting against sin, and growing in grace; or else that there was a time when you were ignorant of the things of God, regardless of your spiritual concerns, and lived only to your own will and pleasure; but that now you have your eyes opened to see clearly the danger and misery of such a condition, and are happily brought home to Christ. What can you say to these things, and what is it that hinders you from making the inquiry, Am I in Christ, or not? If you never entered upon this examination, and find a backwardness in yourselves to do it now, it is a very bad sign, and you may be sure that all is wrong with you. You would not act thus in a worldly matter, or where a small property was to be gained or lost. But I say, what hinders you from thinking of the state of your souls, or how your lot is likely to be cast for eternity? Is it the farm, or the shop, trade, or daily labour? Hard indeed would the lot of all such be, if they were necessarily excluded by their condition in life from the common benefit of the Saviour of mankind. But this is contrary both to truth and matter of fact. For the knowledge of salvation, and strict attention to it, is not only consistent with any man's worldly business, but, when rightly understood, a help to it; as it engages him to a conscientious diligence in it, binds him to the law of sobriety, temperance, and frugality, and is the surest means of bringing down the blessing of God upon his endeavours. At the first preaching of the Gospel, both St. Paul and St. James tell us that the poor and busy part of mankind were the chosen of God, rich in faith, and heirs of his grace; and it is to be hoped there are many such at all times, who "seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, in the first place," and at the same time that they "give all diligence to make their calling and election

sure," are at least as industrious, prudent, and successful in their worldly affairs, as other men. But if you will still abide by this plea of business, as an excuse for your ignorance or neglect of the common salvation, then hear Christ. "Martha, Martha," says he, "thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful;" Luke, x. 41, 42. As you love your souls, let this be a word of conviction to you, and suffer not a thought to arise in your hearts that any thing else is more needful. And again, when the servant who was sent to bid many to the supper of the Gospel, came and told his Lord that all with one consent excused themselves for worldly reasons, he answered, that "none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper," Luke, xiv. 24. What now must I say to you? And what would you think of me, if I was to tell you, in downright contradiction to Christ, that all may be well with you, though you slight his invitation, refuse mercy, and will not come in upon his call to be the people of God? Refuse mercy! No, you will say, God forbid; that your appearance in this place, to offer up your prayers to God, and hear his word read and preached, bears witness for you that you do not; and moreover that you live reputably in the world, and have as good hearts and good meanings as the best. But now suppose you had never been baptized, and were told, in order to it, that you must "renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; that you must believe all the articles of the Christian faith; keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life;" and that otherwise you could not be "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven:" would not this put you to a stand? Would you not think it necessary to have some proper knowledge, and inquire

carefully into the meaning of what you promise to believe and do, before you took the vow upon you? Would you not ask your hearts over and over again, whether you were sincere in it? And could you think yourselves entitled to the benefits made over to you in baptism, if you did not seriously purpose to perform the conditions on which they depend? Well now, you have been baptized, you have been received into Christ's flock, you profess to believe in him, worship God in his name, and are called upon from time to time to understand why you believe, what are the blessings you hope for, and what engagements you laid yourselves under: and what do you do? you plead ignorance, business, want of time, civility of behaviour, the poor form of your appearance in this place on Sundays, and I know not how many other things, against real conversion by Christ, knowledge of your want of him, faith grounded upon that knowledge, and religion in the heart. My brethren, I am sure that none who take up these excuses are fit to be admitted to baptism, neither would they think of it themselves. You may make a great matter of your being baptized, and called Christians; but I leave you to judge, and I pray God enable you to do it effectually, whether you do not build a great deal too much upon it, and whether any can be the people and children of God, and heirs of everlasting life, without the knowledge of their baptismal vow, and a life framed according to it. If therefore you would be the people of God, you must know what it is to be so, and learn to pray that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;" Eph. i. 17, 18. So St. Paul prayed

for the Ephesians; and so he taught them and us to pray for ourselves; hereby giving us to understand what a Christian state is, and that all alike, without any difference of high or low, must both know the nature of their high calling in Christ, and be earnest with God in prayer to be enlightened in it more and more, and have all the blessings of it confirmed to them, as what above all things they esteem and covet. God is a reconciled Father to his people, and takes delight in them as the children and heirs of his kingdom. Then before, we were alienated from him, and enemies to him, and so accounted of by him, or else we should not have needed the mercy of reconciliation: do you know this? Reconciliation was not effected by any work of our own, but is the gift and grace of God to us, and the mercy of it obtained for us by the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ: do you believe this? And do you see what a dreadful evil sin is, and what a curse there is in it, when it could be purged, and a way opened for us to the favour of God, with nothing but the blood of Christ? Do you perceive that your own sin must either be so purged, or lie upon your souls for ever? Do you know that the Holy Spirit must open your eyes to discern between light and darkness, life and death, to see your condemnation in sin, and deliverance from it, to incline your hearts and wills to embrace this great salvation, to rejoice in the faith of it, and to live unto God as those who are redeemed from their vain conversation in the world, and hope to live with him for ever? And are you walking with God according to this knowledge and belief, and whatever your degree of understanding, faith, and hope is, praying for the increase of it? This is being the people of God; and if you have any belief of the happiness of such a state, the present comfort and future glory of it; if you know, indeed, how lost you are in

yourselves, and how gracious the Lord has been to you, you cannot but desire and pray above all things to be established in it. When Christ had been discoursing with the two disciples after his resurrection, and "expounding to them in all the Scriptures the things in them concerning himself, they said one to another, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" Luke, xxiv. 32. Such hearts he makes wherever he comes, and Christ opened there sets them on fire. Do not, therefore, think you can be Christians without prizing Christ and his salvation; or that you can prize it without knowing what it is; or that you can know what it is without knowing your want of it. He delivers from sin, removes the load of it from the conscience, and the power of it from the heart; but if your sin has never been discovered to you in the daily breach of God's commandments, Christ will be as nothing in your eyes. You must therefore give way to this discovery, cast away all your vain excuses, be willing to know the truth of your condition, beg of God to search you, and when you find that you are not his people, give yourselves no rest till you are.

Some of you may be grown old without ever making the inquiry, or one serious thought about the salvation of Christ. Oh! redeem the little time you have left. Pray to God to open your eyes. Seek the Lord while he may be found. The door of grace still stands open for you, if you will enter into it. Christ has a heart and a will to receive you, if you will come unto God by him. Make haste and escape for the life of your souls. Do not die without obtaining mercy.

If you are in the strength and vigour of your age, and have a prospect, as you think, of many years to come, let Christ teach you how to sweeten them to yourselves.

And if, upon looking back, you do not find that hitherto you have made him your hope and your confidence, think what poor comfort you take up with in the way of sin, or a mere worldly life, in comparison of what you might have from a well-grounded assurance that you are of the number of God's people. Think how uncertain life is, how short at the best, and how dreadful it would be to be called to your last account, without being in readiness for it by a life of faith.

To the young man I say, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth;" Eccl. xii. 1. Mark that word *now*. List not yourselves into the devil's service, lest you never escape from it. Give him not a day of your lives. See on the one hand the broad way of destruction, and Christ on the other pointing out and calling you into the way of grace and salvation. If you make a right choice now, you will be established more and more in Christ's peace, make God your friend, fear nothing that can befall you in the world, knowing that he is so, and be prepared for his time of calling you out of it, whether it be sooner or later. But if you choose to live without God, without Christ and Christian hope, never ask yourselves what you must do to be saved, and rush blindly into the snares which are laid for you by the enemy of your souls, — you have nothing before you but a bitter repentance, if that time should ever come; and, in the meanwhile, you are in a state which you should tremble to think of.

Let those who live in sin, and flatter themselves with the hope of mercy without repentance, know that they are not the Lord's people. They do not so much as believe in God, but disown and deny him, according to the revelation he has made of himself. For the God who made the heavens and the earth, the God of Scripture, is he who has a right to govern his creatures, and will be

obeyed. If ever you give way to cool reflection, consider how wretchedly absurd and impious the thought is, and how impossible it is that you should be entitled to his favour, or objects of mercy, while you continue in rebellion against him. Oh! quit this vain delusion, give up the lie in your right hand, and turn your eyes to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; in him calling you to be his people, and with astonishing patience yet waiting to be gracious to you; in him "forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," your ten thousand provocations of his justice, but "who will by no means clear the guilty;" as all are who do not see their guilt taken away by Christ, and in the sense of so great a mercy live unto him that died for them, and become new creatures in the truth of a pure obedience.

Let those who exalt themselves against the Saviour, and, in the main, make but little account of "salvation by grace, through faith," because they have a better appearance than many others, and can justify themselves before men, remember that they have to do with a heart-searching God, and that sins innumerable will be found upon them, to their everlasting confusion, if they have not made Christ their hope. He stooped very low, and submitted to a painful life and ignominious death, to save them from the sin which looks so little in their eyes; but if they will not condescend to be washed in his blood, as sinners, learn of him a better holiness than they will ever teach themselves, and, with unfeigned humility, call themselves unprofitable servants when they have done the very best they ever will do, he will despise their boasted morals, has already excluded them from the number of God's people, and pronounced the sentence of condemnation upon their self-righteous formality, in these words three several times repeated, "Whosoever exalteth

himself shall be abased;" Matt. xxiii. 12; Luke, xiv. 11; xviii. 14.

O ye people of God! in faith, hope, and charity, I am not worthy to speak to you. One word you will bear from an apostle of our Lord; as you have given up your names to Christ, go on in the power of his might, "building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life;" Jude, 20, 21.

And I say to all, in the words of St. James, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you;" iv. 8. Make deep search into yourselves; know your hearts, know your sin; look unto Jesus, as the Peace-maker in his blood, and the Lord our righteousness, that you may rejoice in the mercy of heaven, and live unto God, as his people, in faith and holiness. Indeed, my brethren, one hour of serious Scripture reading, one prayer from the heart, would do a great deal towards removing those mountains of difficulties which now stand in your way. I do not mean that you would, or ought to be content with that, for if you were once awakened you would see the necessity of doing a great deal more; but a sad thing it is not to have one such hour, one such prayer, to think of in a whole life. The Lord grant unto us, that, in the acceptance of his mercy, in the faith of Christ, and the power of the eternal Spirit, we may all be his people; not for worldly things, or even spiritual comforts, desirable as they are, but "pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," Phil. iii. 14, and "striving to enter into that blessed rest which remaineth to the people of God," in the everlasting enjoyment of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

SERMON XXVI.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Matt. vii. 7.

PRAYER is the life of a Christian, and the proof of a Christian state. I mean secret prayer, the desire of the heart for spiritual blessings, that we may live unto God, and be fitted for heaven by the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Prayer for repentance, prayer for faith, prayer for holiness. Prayer for the Spirit to enlighten our understandings, to alter the vicious bent of our wills and affections, to keep us steady to our great work, and carry us happily through it. These are the things we want; what God wants to give us, what Christ came to offer us, and what therefore we must and shall pray for, if ever we be recovered to God by him. We must know distinctly that we want remission of sins, peace with God, and spiritual strength, and be very inwardly stirred up to seek after them as the life of our souls.

My friends, *do* you, *can* you thus pray for your souls? And is the desire of your hearts indeed turned to God for the blessings of Christ and his Gospel? Then your eyes are opened, you are in God's way of happiness, and there shall be a performance of all that has been told you. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." God is your Father, Christ is your Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit will be your Guide and Comforter. The portion you choose for yourselves, and ask of God, is kept safe for you; and no accident, no malice of men or devils, can deprive you of it. The desire of heaven will as certainly carry you thither, as God is now there. If your prayers are gone before, you must follow them. Christ has taken possession of it in your names; and where he is, there

shall you be also. He has prepared a place for you, and will prepare you for it, by raising up the life and nature of heaven in you. This is what I am to open and declare to you; and I pray God enable me to do it to your conviction. Christ says, Ask, seek, knock; i. e. as I have already told you, ask for the Spirit, seek for a blessing upon your souls, knock, that the door of grace may be opened to you. If you are a natural worldly man, pray that your eyes may be opened, and your heart turned within you; if you are a convinced man, pray that your sins may be forgiven; if you are a believer, pray continually for your establishment in the faith, and increase in godliness. And that they are the things of the Spirit, and those only, which you are here required to ask, you may be satisfied by comparing Luke, xi. 13, where it is said, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask him?"

1. Therefore consider the *importance* of them. The things of this world we *may* want; we may be patient and contented though we have them not; we may be well pleased and happy without them. For the most part, they are a hinderance to us in our Christian progress; and if they are not desired with moderation, and employed to the glory of God, will be a curse to us instead of a blessing. But the things which God offers to our choice, and warrants us to ask of him, peace by Jesus Christ, renewal to his image in holiness and fitness for heaven, as they are unspeakably great in themselves, so we must be for ever undone, if we are not possessed of them. They are the riches of our souls, and the things of eternity. Everlasting happiness or misery depends upon our seeking or not seeking after them. They are what Christ calls the one thing needful—needful in the highest degree, and as if nothing else was so. Whatever else we

do for ourselves, can signify nothing to the great end we were made for, the favour of God, and our acceptance with him. And for this end Christ came into the world, that he might raise us out of our dead state, turn our eyes and hearts to the work of our salvation, convince us of the necessity of securing it, and put us in a way of doing it. He saw us in our wretched condition of blindness, corruption, and alienation from God. He saw us dead in trespasses and sins, the devil's bond slaves, and liable to eternal death. Our misery pierced him to the heart. And, when nothing could relieve us from it but his incarnation and death, he took our flesh, and with it our sins, and was made a curse for us, that we might be delivered from wrath, and have hope towards God. See your condition in this glass. Think how it appears to God. Consider what Christ did and suffered to open your eyes, to bring you to repentance, to reconcile you to God by faith, to confirm you in a state of holy willing obedience, to prepare you for the heavenly inheritance, and you will be convinced of the necessity of being so prepared, and of the great value and importance of the blessings he has purchased for you, and of the graces he came to work in you. You would ask them of God, as you would pray for your lives, and be very thankful to him for putting you in a condition of obtaining them by Christ, and for giving you such an assurance of it as he has done in the words of the text: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

2. Besides the great value of the things to be asked, and their unspeakable importance to us, let us also duly consider our *weakness*. They must be had, and yet of ourselves we cannot attain them. For "it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure;" Phil. ii. 13. And this is manifestly implied

in the exhortation to ask, seek, and knock. For God would not put us upon asking of *him* what we have of our own, and could easily give to ourselves if we please. No; the Spirit, with all his blessings, is *his* gift. Repentance is his gift, faith is his gift, holiness is his gift. Our whole salvation is his gift, and we want assistance in every part of it. Our souls must be continually watered with the dew of heaven, and can only bring forth fruit, as the earth does, by a blessing from above. The work we have to do can never prosper in our hands, without some better help than our own. We are bowed down with a spirit of infirmity. We have crooked natures, which we cannot reform; earthly hearts, which we cannot change; stubborn wills, which we cannot bend; evil lustings, and unruly passions, which we cannot master in our own strength. Brethren, I fear we generally deceive ourselves in two respects; either by taking a false measure of our work, or supposing that it may go well with us though we leave it undone. If, in the main, we think it needless, we shall of course be slothful in it, and mind other things a great deal more. And, on the other hand, if we take a wrong measure of our work, that is, bring it down to a small matter, and proportion it to our abilities, and resolve with ourselves that God shall accept us for what we can do without him, we shall for ever keep ourselves out of the way of help. But when once we are convinced, in good earnest, that we are in an evil case by departing from God, and must become new creatures; that our natural desires and inclinations must be changed; that sin must be hated, and God loved; that we must cleave to Christ in sincerity, and forsake the vain customs of the world, and put ourselves in the pilgrim's path to heaven; that we must strike at the root of all corruption in the heart, and be holy as God is holy, and perfect as he is perfect; — we shall then say, who is

sufficient for these things? and cry mightily to the Lord for help. I do not mention the difficulty of your work to discourage you. It is fit you should know it, that you may know how to combat it, and that there is no hope of surmounting it with any degree of success, but by continual dependence upon God. You know your worldly business will not prosper without the divine blessing, and yet you do not think this a reason for neglecting it, but sow in hope, and reap the fruit of your labours. Think and act thus for your souls. Look up to God in your spiritual concerns, and let the sense of your weakness keep you close to him in prayer. There is your remedy. All difficulties will fall down before it, and without it you can do nothing. Nature will maintain its ground, the world will be your portion, sin will reign in you, and the strong man armed keep possession, in spite of all your endeavours.

3. But now, lest we should be hindered by any vain reasonings in this matter, as if the exercise of prayer was a questioning of the omniscience, infinite goodness, and unchangeableness of God, who knows, without our information, what is best for us, will be moved by his own gracious will to bestow it without our asking, and cannot be wrought upon by any importunity of ours to change his purposes; or lest we should be discouraged, by the sense of our unworthiness, from approaching so great a Majesty, and notwithstanding the *importance* of the blessings we want, and our *utter inability* to receive them in any other way than as a gift from God, fear to ask them; let me desire you to consider once more, that he has removed all such apprehensions, and answered all objections to the duty of prayer, by an express *command* to us, to lay our wants before him, and by making our asking the condition of obtaining. He has in mercy made it our duty to importune him with our earnest

petitions, for what he knows to be necessary for us; and by not asking, we add to all our other transgressions the breach of a plain command. For such the text is: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." This does not mean that we may choose whether we will ask or not, but lays us under a necessity of doing it. And we wrong our souls every way by not complying with the injunction. We famish them by not seeking for those supplies of grace which must keep them alive; and plunge them deeper into guilt by a continued act of wilful disobedience. This, like every other command, obliges strictly to performance, as such; and we cannot neglect it without throwing up our duty, and rebelling against the authority of God. But then, like every other command, it points to a blessing. For God commands nothing for his own sake, or because of any advantage it brings to him, but solely for the use and benefit of man; either to prevent our misery, or procure some great good to us. And what good does prayer, true prayer, not procure to us? It is the key to the heart of God, the bond of our friendship with him, brings heaven into the soul, and fills it with the riches of eternity.

For these reasons, — because we *must* have spiritual blessings from God — because we are in a state of great *weakness* and disorder, and cannot give them to ourselves — and because of the *command* — every man whose eyes are opened *does* pray. It is the bent of his renewed nature, his will is to it, and his heart is in it. He presents himself continually before God, with some such words as these: "Oh, cast not out my prayer, nor turn thy mercy from me!" His work is before him, he knows what he has to pray for, and cannot but pray. He loves his soul, values the peace of God, aims at heaven, and would not neglect his title to it for the world. And he

knows that prayer is the great means of attaining and securing it; of excellent and most necessary use to keep the sense of God fresh and lively in our minds; to fix us in a state of dependence on him, and communion with him; to remind us continually of our duties, sins, wants, and weakness, and engage the attention of the soul to its great everlasting interest.

I now come to draw this matter to a point; and thereby to fasten conviction upon you, and give you a sight of your condition. Help, O God! for without thee, the words of man are vain, and I shall only speak into the air.

There is not so much as one in this whole assembly, who does not call and think himself a Christian, let his outward appearance and conversation be what it will. The drunkard, the profane swearer, the stealer, the liar, the sabbath-breaker, the notorious open sinner, seen and known of all men, pretends to have hope towards God, and trusts in mercy; and when his title to it is called in question, "the fool rageth, and is confident." They are Solomon's words, and I must make no apology for them. Others do not sin so grossly. Others again are still more smooth and civil in their behaviour, and in the main can justify themselves before men. And these last, especially, have no doubt of the goodness of their state, and stand amazed when they are called upon to examine it, and consider what ground they are upon for life. But now, the point I would keep you to, one and all, and the question I would ask, is this — Is Christ precious to you, and salvation by him the great desire of your hearts, so that you cannot but wish to have that work prosper with you, whatever becomes of you in other respects, and accordingly pray for a blessing upon it, truly, earnestly, daily? This is a great deal more than any kind of outward behaviour — any form or appearance of religion.

You may be tolerably exact in your outward walk, from natural prudence or worldly interest. You may join in the public worship of God, for decency's sake, or partly to quiet conscience, which will not let you be easy in the total neglect of it. But still this is no proof of conversion. It may be, and often is great self-deceit, to seal you up in blindness, and keep you from Christ. Ask yourselves therefore, does the sense of your wants, and the experience of your weakness, drive you to God? Are you in a state of prayer for the blessings of the new covenant, redemption by Christ, and renewal to the image of God in holiness? If you are not, the case is plain with you. You can only be self-righteous at the best. You have received nothing from God, because you will not ask. Your hearts are not moved within you as they should be. You are cold and unconcerned where all is at stake. You should tremble to think of the condition you are in. Is it far more than a matter of life and death; is it grace or no grace, Christ or no Christ, with you; is the point whether you shall be redeemed men and women, restored to the favour of God, and made fit for heaven, or die in your sins; are you not only allowed, but commanded to ask for remission of sins, faith, and a new heart; does the Scripture say, Pray, pray, pray; ask, it shall be given you — and have you no will to it? Consider, I say, what you are, and whether here is not full proof of your being in a dead state. A Christian, and not pray? — Why, it is his nature, the proper working of the new life he has received, the breath by which he lives; and if a child can live without air when it is born into the world, so may you be alive to God's kingdom of grace without prayer. Do not mistake, do not deceive yourselves. I do not mean only saying of prayers, whether at church or any where else; a man may do this without one spark of a true

life in him, and be very exact in it all his days, without ever coming under a work of grace. No; the HEART must pray; for the lips only cannot. The man must have one great desire to be delivered from the body of his death. He must be awakened to a sense of his corruption, and seek his remedy, as he would under the sharp pains of a bodily distemper. He must long to be a partaker of the grace of God in Christ, and set it up as the mark he is aiming at, and value nothing in comparison of it, and be continually calling out for spiritual strength. This is prayer, this is conversion and newness of life, this is worshipping in Spirit and in truth. This every Christian does, and whoever does not, or cannot thus pray, is in darkness. He neither knows what he is, nor what he wants. Christian salvation is not the pearl of great price with him. Whatever he may think of himself, or whatever he is doing in the world, or in religion, he is alienated from the life of God, and a stranger to the new birth. For all the children of God as certainly look up to him for his gifts, and have the same earnest will to obtain them, as the men of this world have for earthly things; and if prayer was not commanded, they would fly to it of themselves, and be carried to it by their own feeling. See a lively picture of this in all those sick and diseased who came to Christ for a cure. See it more especially in the woman of Canaan, who would not be beat off from him with any denial. See it in blind Bartimeus, who cried out amain, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" would not have his mouth stopped, and when he was called, cast away his garment for haste, to come to Jesus.

Thus we should all be affected. What thou readest in Scripture, must spring up in thy soul, and be thy own feeling. Know thy corruption and death, know thy wants and weakness, thy want of healing, thy want of

Christ, thy want of grace to do the will of God, and then keep thyself from him and hold thy tongue, if thou canst. Here we fail wretchedly. We are not in a state of secret prayer from a sense of our condition, and this makes us backward to it in other respects. We can come to church on Sundays, but nauseate the worship of God upon any other day, and have not so much as a Christian appearance, by setting it up in our families. We have a multitude of vain excuses to lay conscience asleep, and harden ourselves in an evil way. Let the farm be minded, and let Christ go. So you say in effect. Business must be pretended, though many a time and oft you have none that need keep you from doing a charitable office to your starving souls. Oh! this could never be if faith was active and striving in us, if we sought the kingdom of God and his righteousness in the first place, if we were giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure. We should then ask, seek, and knock, like poor beggars, as we are, and resolve to take no denial. Our not doing it, I say it again, is full proof that we are in the deadness of a natural state. This is the point I have been aiming to bring you to, and I pray God strike it this hour with deep conviction into your hearts — If you are not in a state of prayer, you are not in a state of salvation. — Christ is nothing to you; and you grossly deceive yourselves, if you think your interest in him is any part of your concern. I will bring the matter still more home to you, if I can.

If we knew certainly that we could better ourselves in our worldly estate, preserve the health of our bodies, and add to our heap by praying, we should not slight it, but find it an easy and delightful service. Now what is the reason of this? It is because we truly and sincerely wish for these things, they lie next our hearts, and we would be sure not to go without them for want of

a daily prayer. And if we neglected this condition of obtaining them, it would be a certain sign that we set no value upon them. Ah! my brethren, the application is easy. You do not love your souls; God is not your portion; Christ is not your life; heaven is not your aim; salvation is not your great business in the world; you value none of these things. If you did, you would pray, as certainly as you desire to eat when you are hungry, and much more than you would for your bodies. You would know what St. Paul means, when he says, "pray without ceasing." "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" would almost always be uppermost in your thoughts. The spirit of grace and of supplications would be poured upon you. You would abound in every kind and instance of prayer. You would meet God in secret, and in the depth of your hearts. You who can, and many of you can, would meet me here on a week day; and all would take up the resolution of Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Josh. xxiv. 15. And that more especially, as we are confident from the text that all our petitions of this kind will be granted; "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

There may be, and doubtless are, different degrees of this spirit of prayer in different persons, according to the different measures of their faith; neither is the disposition and will to pray always at the same height in any. Alas! the best have occasion to complain of their being too often cold and unaffected in their addresses to God; and it is their trouble when they are so. But what they *do* ask in the first place, whenever they pray, and *would* always ask with the greatest earnestness of desire, is to be established in the faith, to love God, to know Christ, and improve in all manner of holiness

according to his Gospel. And this is required of all, as a necessary proof of a work of grace in their hearts.

Let me now observe to you, what perhaps you may think strange, that so long as we live, we cannot but pray, in some way or other, either for God or our lusts, for good or evil. Every man prays according to his state. The wicked or worldly man prays, and prays continually too, though he does not directly intend it, nor put the wish of his heart into a form of words. What we most delight in, that is our prayer, and nothing else; and God sees it always to be so, and cannot be deceived by any words to a contrary meaning. Oh! what a sad state is that for a man to be in, to have his will and inward desire so contrary to the will of God, that in reality he is always praying against himself!

But suppose a person so far awakened, as to be convinced that he neither does, nor knows how to pray according to the mind and will of God, that he has lived in utter neglect of the duty, is an utter stranger to a praying frame of mind, has wronged his soul and lost his baptism, and therefore is in a most dangerous condition of unbelief, what must he do? Call out of the deep, as he would if he was drowning. He is in a melancholy, woful plight; but something must be done. Though he cannot pray as a saint, he may pray as a sinner, sensible of his misery and danger. He must cry mightily to the Lord, for grace and mercy to help him in his time of need. And if he does, his prayer will not be rejected. The text has a blessing in it for *him*. "Ask, and it shall be given thee; seek, and thou shalt find; knock, and it shall be opened unto thee." Pray for repentance, and when thy repentings are kinded within thee, they will lead thee on to pray for faith, and the prayer of faith will be the joy of thy life.

Oh! begin, begin to pray as you can, and as God

shall enable you, that you may go on to receive the full benefit of the promise contained in these gracious words. For they are a box of very precious ointment, and I must not conclude without breaking it open. Think what you are, and what you may be, what you are by nature, and what you may be by grace; that you are children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins, want remission and holiness to fit you for heaven; that death is your desert, and life is offered you; that you may be restored to the favour of God, his children by adoption, and joint heirs with Christ; that you may have his love shed abroad in your hearts, and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost; that instead of the miserable comforts of this vain life, you may have joy in God, and a blessed foretaste of heaven in your souls; that instead of being under the dominion of sin, feeling its curse in your natures, and dreading the eternal punishment of it, you may have strength against it, and be delivered both from its reigning and condemning power; that all Christ did and suffered will be yours, and God himself your God for ever and ever;—Think, I say, when you hear these words, that all this, and much more than I can mention, is contained in them; deliverance from all evil, possession or hope of all good; all the love of the Father, all the blessings of the Son, all the comforts of the Spirit. May God incline you to ask, and enlarge your hearts to receive them!

You, who know what it is to ask, and how to ask aright, be sure not to ask for a little. The grant is without limitation; ask, and it shall be given you; raise your desires to the height of it. Ask for the presence of God in your souls, ask for renewed wills and pure hearts, ask for faith, hope, and charity; and know that when you have asked all you can think of, if your wishes

reach at heaven, God is able to do, and will do, exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think.

No words can describe the blessedness of a soul which thus lives in communion with God; asking and receiving, seeking and finding, knocking, and having the door opened. For what is happiness but this? Or how can we describe it better, than by saying, that a man wishes for the very thing he ought, and is sure to have it? And such is the man of prayer, the Christian. He chooses the fountain of all happiness for his portion, and cannot be disappointed of his desire. He is happy in the very act of prayer, knowing it to be the right frame of his mind, the proof of his renewed state, and his capacity for receiving blessing from God. And he is happy in the returns of it; increasing in knowledge, faith, and holiness, and passing through the world with a hope full of immortality. O blessed Jesus, teach us all to pray: for the desire is from thee, and thou givest thyself with it, and we cannot receive thee till we do pray.

For, on the other hand, the words have a curse wrapped up in them, as well as a blessing, that of leaving all prayerless men to themselves. They have not, because they ask not. And what all nature would be without blessing from God, what the earth would be without rain and sunshine, what a prisoner would be in the deepest dungeon, such is the condition of every soul, however improved in other respects, which feels no want, desires no relief, and therefore does not, cannot pray, but shuts itself up in its own darkness, corruption, and miserable weakness. May God make us sensible of it, and deliver us from it!

O Lord, thy heart is toward the children of men, and thine ears are always open to their prayers; thou hast

sent thy Son into the world to awaken us to a sense of our lost condition, and redeem us from it; thou sendest thy Spirit into our hearts, to raise in us strong cries after thee; so work in us by thy grace, that we may see the things which belong to our everlasting peace, and turn to thee in prayer for the blessings which thou hast promised and prepared for us in Jesus Christ. To whom, with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, be glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON XXVII.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Exod. xx. 18.

THE Sabbath is of divine appointment for the service and benefit of man; to keep the sense of God fresh and lively upon our minds, to unite our hearts to him, to turn our thoughts to the contemplation of that eternal rest for which we were made and sent into the world, and keep us in a state of continual preparation for it; that by spending that day more especially, under the obligation of a command from God, in sacred employments, in the care of our souls, and the more solemn performance of religious worship and religious duties, we might be the better disposed to keep every other commandment, and spend every day of our lives in such a serious and Christian manner, as will yield us true comfort here, and qualify us for the everlasting enjoyment of God in heaven.

I am this day to plead with you on God's behalf for the observation of a command which is of unspeakable importance to your souls, the honour of God, and the interest of religion. And if I should speak in such a manner as, with the Spirit's help, to show you your

transgression, and convince you of sin, I hope it will have the effect I aim at in all my preaching; which is, to bring you in repentance to the Lord Jesus Christ for remission, and through him to a willing subjection and obedience to the God and Father of your spirits. Lord, have mercy on us, and help us, for we are bowed down to the earth; and thy Sabbaths, which should remind us of our great business in the world, are a burden to us. We neglect and profane them; and instead of employing them in thy service, and a diligent preparation for eternity, they return only to increase our guilt, and expose us to a heavier sentence of condemnation.

Brethren, here is a positive, plain command of the most high God, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;" with a particular mark of observation set upon it, "Remember!" For if thou dost not, it is at the hazard of thy soul. So far as thou art disposed to keep it, thou art alive unto God; so far as thou dost keep it, thy soul will prosper. The command is for thy soul. Nothing else that thou dost, can prove thee to be in the way of godliness; nothing will be such a means to keep thee in it, and promote thy spiritual comfort and edification. Keep it as unto the Lord, to get above the world, to think of and fit thyself for heaven, and it will be blessed to thy eternal advantage. Neglect it, or loiter it away in idleness, or at best in the formality of a merely outward worship, and thy great work will be at a stand with thee all the days of thy life. It is in this view I would speak to you of the Sabbath. And when you see and consider the reason of its appointment, it will show you in a strong light the necessity of caring for your souls, enable you to judge of your religious state, and, if the command is not weighty upon your minds, convince you of sin. For every one that hears me is either a religious observer of the Sabbath, or an un-

converted worldling; and wherever it is slighted, or unimproved, there is neither grace in the heart, nor desire of it.

In order to your understanding more clearly what I have to say to you upon this subject, and that you may go along with me in every part of my discourse;

I. I shall consider the *time when* the law of the Sabbath was first given.

II. The *place where* it was given.

III. The time and manner of its being renewed.

IV. I shall set before you the end and reason of the Sabbath's being appointed.

I. We may observe, that the law of the Sabbath is the first mentioned in Scripture, and therefore probably God's first command, given to Adam as a standing memorial of his resting from the work of creation, to be conveyed through him to all his posterity, and as it began with the creation of the world, to endure to the end of it. I say, this command has a peculiar claim to our attention, as being the *first* which came from the mouth of God. We may be sure that, for this very reason, it contains matter of high regard, and is of the utmost consequence to the glory of God, and the well-being of man. Hear the solemn words of institution, as they stand recorded, Gen. ii. 2, 3. "And on the seventh day God" (had) "ended his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." Vainly do some pretend that this was delivered only by way of anticipation, as a declaration of what God intended to do afterwards, and to give the greater weight and authority to the command of the Sabbath, when it should be published by his servant

Moses in the decalogue, at the end of more than two thousand four hundred years. Here is nothing said or implied to countenance such a notion; and I could as soon believe that the world was not created, according to the relation which is given of it in the first chapter of the Bible, or that the sun did not shine from the beginning, as that the seventh day was not then immediately blessed and sanctified to the use of man. From the moment there was a man upon earth, and as soon as time was, it was the will of God that a seventh part of it should be more immediately consecrated to his service, that he might be solemnly owned as the Creator, Governor, and Preserver of the world, to fix us in subjection to him, and dependence on him, to keep his image alive in us, to remind us perpetually that our rest is not here, and increase our thirst after those eternal pleasures at his right hand, for which he gave us our beings. It is true, this original institution of the Sabbath is not delivered in the form of a command. But to what end can we suppose it was blessed and sanctified then, if it was not to take place immediately, given to the first man as a law, and bound upon him by an express injunction, as a perpetual and most sacred ordinance, to him and all succeeding generations? And, therefore, when it is said that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, the words can have no other meaning than that it was intended for a general blessing to mankind at all times, and should be blessed to them in the sanctified use and observation of it. And, accordingly, the great design, sacredness, and necessity of it, is thus explained by the prophet Ezekiel, xx. 12. "I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them." When God separated the family of Abraham as a holy nation, to revive the knowledge of himself, and to prepare them and

all others for the last discovery he was to make of himself, and the full display of his mercy, truth, and purity, in the religion of Christ, what did he do to put them perpetually in mind of their duty and privilege? what was their badge of distinction? what were the chosen means for continuing and preserving them a holy people? The prophet says, he gave them the Sabbath. Not that it was first given and appointed to the Jews at the delivery of the law on Mount Sinai — for it appears, from Scripture history, that it was in use before, and no doubt in virtue of the primitive institution — but renewed and confirmed to them, with a particular charge for the strict observation of it; as if, without it, their sanctification, or fitness for heaven, was not to be hoped for, and they would have been in continual danger of relapsing into ignorance and forgetfulness of God. This means, therefore, of holy living, and spiritual improvement, was never withheld from mankind. It was given in aid of our weakness from the beginning. The importance of it appears more especially from the *time* of its appointment; and the prophet, you see, declares the use of it in such a manner as to recommend it to our most serious regard. If it was a sign to the Jews that it was the Lord that sanctified them — that they *must* be sanctified, *could* be sanctified only by him, and certainly *would* be sanctified in this way of his appointing — let all who are in pursuit of holiness consider how this end can be attained without drawing nigh to God, and seeking for a blessing upon their souls, in the devout observation of his Sabbath.

II. Let it be observed, that the Sabbath was given to Adam in Paradise, when he stood before God in the glory of his new creation, and the full vigour and perfection of his nature. Nevertheless, as a creature, he was in a state of dependence and trust in God for the continuance and

increase of his graces, and could no more preserve his innocence, or secure his happiness, without the divine co-operation, than he could make himself at the first. To him, therefore, was this law given, before sin and death entered into the world, to prevent his fall, to keep him close to the Fountain of all good, to qualify him to live in communion with his Maker, to remind him of his impotence, and that he, too, holy and happy as he was, "might know that it was the Lord that sanctified him." The rest he was made for, he was not to attain in this life, but to be trained up for it by a proper discipline. Of which the Sabbath was an excellent part, as being a type of that rest instituted on purpose to confirm his belief of it, to inflame his desires after it, and keep him in a state of preparation for it. The inspired penman says, "God rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." Now, observe; as the work of creation was no labour, so the ending of it, strictly speaking, could be no rest to *him*. But, having been represented as employing himself in the six days' work of creation, his ceasing from it is likewise spoken of as a resting, or returning into himself, or into that rest which he is eternally to himself; and therefore the day on which he thus rested was blessed and sanctified. Certainly not for himself, but to convey life and blessing to man in the observation of it; to reveal, and, as it were, open heaven; and to be a perpetual lesson of instruction to him to turn the eye of his soul from all created objects to that rest into which God is said to have entered, as the end for which he was made, and the great blessing he was warranted to expect from him. Now, if the divine wisdom saw it fit that the first man, in his state of integrity, should be bound to the law of the Sabbath, and have a considerable portion of his time set apart for

sacred recollection, and the devout contemplation of his future rest, how much more expedient and necessary is such an ordinance for mankind in their present degenerate condition of weakness, sensuality, attachment to the world, and alienation from God! Whatever reasons may be assigned for the appointment of it at first, when "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good," are surely of double force now, when "all flesh have corrupted their way before him;" and the more indisposed we are for our proper happiness, the more we are fallen from God, the more need we have of every help, and especially of this great one, to turn our affections to him, and put us in a way of recovery. And accordingly you will perceive, that as we now want the Sabbath for these ends more than ever, so we are still under the discipline of it, and indispensably obliged to keep it holy. For, besides the original universal establishment and enacting of it, as the first law to the first man in Paradise, which would, of course, be conveyed down to his posterity, and as it appears, both from sacred and profane history, was always remembered, God has moreover solemnly confirmed and renewed it.

III. Let us, therefore, consider what account the Scripture gives of its renewal and establishment. If nothing more had been said of it than what is told us in the second chapter of Genesis, and it had never been mentioned again throughout the whole Bible, yet we could not help observing that it must be a matter of the greatest moment to the sons of men, considering the time and place of its delivery; and we should find ourselves very hard put to it to give a reason why it should not be always in force. But God remembers his Sabbath, though we are so apt to slight and forget it. He knows of what importance it is to our happiness, and

how great a blessing there is in it; and that we might have the strongest assurance that it was never to be dispensed with, or grow into disuse, behold! he has set his seal to it a second time, and speaks yet once again in the thunder of Mount Sinai, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." And it is as if he had said, 'Thou knowest that the seventh day is mine, that I consecrated it to myself from the beginning, and that it is sacrilege to rob me of it; thou knowest it is mine for thy sake, that thy heart may not go astray from me, that thy thoughts may not be lost and swallowed up in the business of the world, that thou mayest consider, above all things, that thou art an heir of heaven, and employ this sacred portion of thy time in raising thy affections to it; thou knowest, that if thou dost not, thou wilt be in danger of living only to thyself, an earthly sensual creature, like the beasts that perish; thou wilt forget me, forget the great end for which thou wast created, forget thy immortal state, and, in neglecting the Sabbath, neglect and despise thy eternal interest in me, and preparation for me: and therefore, Remember to keep it holy.' I have already observed to you, that the Sabbath, at this second promulgation of it, was commanded to the Jews both as a sign and means of their sanctification; and that they could neither be acknowledged as the servants and worshippers of God, nor answer the end of their being separated to him as a holy people, without seeking holiness from him in a faithful conscientious observation of it. Obedience to it would be putting themselves in the way of a blessing; and God, no doubt, would bless his own institution to them. And further, it was a warning to them, that, in the neglect of it, nothing would prosper with them. He who knows best why he appointed it, and what an excellent means it is to preserve men at all times from the evil that is in the world and their own

hearts, to keep their minds in a right spiritual frame of love and adherence to him, and make them fit for himself, would work with them in the way of his own appointment, and they must not expect it in any other. It was, therefore, a gracious provision for their happiness, and a signal act of mercy to them, and in them to all others, thus to renew and bind upon them the ordinance of the Sabbath, with a repetition of the same reason which was given for it at the beginning, viz. because in it God rested from his work; and with a particular strict charge to them to "remember and keep it holy," because their sanctification here, and rest with him hereafter, so very much depended upon it. And in order to beget in them a greater reverence and esteem for the Sabbath, now so solemnly renewed, and convince them more fully of their obligation to sanctify it to the Lord, in a holy use of it, they were directed to consider the miracle of sending manna as wrought in part for that end. "See," said God to them, "for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days: abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day;" Exod. xvi. 29. When some of them perversely made the experiment whether it would keep two days, "it bred worms and stank;" ver. 20. When they were ordered to gather a double quantity of it the sixth day, that they might have no pretence for not resting on the seventh, "it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein;" ver. 24. The matter was evident to their senses, and the will of God being thus confirmed, well might he expostulate with them, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" ver. 28. From whence we may gather that the Sabbath was not unknown to them before, and that they were sensible of their obligation to observe it, though either they had not done it, or not as they

ought, or else it would not have been said to them, *How long* refuse ye to keep my commandments? And I cannot help observing farther upon this passage, with respect to those who think every Sabbath so much time lost, and wish with all their hearts that they were at liberty to follow their callings then, nay, and do so more or less, that possibly they may miscount their gains, and had better trust God to make them amends for resting upon that day, by blessing all the other six to them. We read of some who "sowed much, and brought in little, had not meat and drink to fill them, nor clothes to keep them warm, and put the wages they earned into a bag with holes;" Haggai, i. 6. All went wrong with them for their disobedience to God, and Sabbath-breakers have as much reason to fear this curse as any. But whatever becomes of their worldly affairs, I am sure they wrong and famish their souls; and will find, without repentance, that they have been doing worse than labouring for the wind. Sirs, you must act as you please, for you *will;* against law and commandment, in spite of God and man. The Sabbath-breaker is not now stoned, as he was under Moses, and that for gathering a few sticks; the matter is left to your own feeling and conscience. But methinks your Christian name might shame you into some regard to a command, which you cannot but observe God lays a very great stress upon, and that because it is of such moment to your own spiritual eternal welfare. And if you will still go on in your rebellion against God, know that he will not be mocked, and that you must one day feel the weight of those words, which at present are nothing but an empty sound to you, "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell!" Matt. x. 28. It is, my brethren, it is a matter of great concern to your souls. The Sabbath is not to be thus trifled with, or lightly regarded. As you love your souls, you must not

follow your worldly business on that day. And I wish you would also take notice, in the fear of God, that the buyer is no more clear of guilt than the seller, and, by parity of reason, whoever uses his neighbour's service in any kind on that day; and that if one sins, the other tempts to it. Hear what is said in Nehemiah, and be instructed by that zealous servant of God, whose praise it is to all generations that he laboured so faithfully and earnestly in restoring his worship. When "the people, every one having knowledge, and having understanding, entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law" — this is mentioned amongst other things which they had solemnly bound themselves unto, that "if the people of the land bring ware, or any victuals, on the Sabbath-day, to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day;" x. 28—31. And when they transgressed this covenant afterwards, and bought what was brought to be sold on the Sabbath, "then," says he, "I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath-day?" xiii. 17.

If you should ask now, what regard Christ paid to the Sabbath? you will perceive that he left it as he found it, without diminishing one jot from its authority. And though he had frequent occasion to correct some mistakes of the Jews about it, who supposed that the sacredness of it was violated by works of mercy and necessity, yet he never gave the least hint that it was going to be abolished. And if we may judge from the succeeding practice of the apostles and first Christians, we shall have cause to believe that he was not wanting to them in his instructions concerning it. For it appears from Scripture, and we are assured by universal tradition, that they held it in the same veneration they had done before their conversion. Only with this remarkable

difference; that whereas the Sabbath was ordained from the beginning as a memorial of God's resting from the work of creation, and dedicated to his honour and service as the Maker of heaven and earth; and afterwards (probably) fixed to the day on which the Jews were delivered out of Egypt; so it was again changed to the day of Christ's resurrection; from thence ever since called the LORD'S DAY; and also, as we are told, for this farther reason, because it was generally believed by the primitive Christians, that our Lord would come again on that day to judge the world. I say, this is very remarkable; inasmuch as this change of the day by the apostles not only confirms, but in effect new enacts the Sabbath. For it is not to be supposed that they would have ventured to make this innovation without a divine direction, either from Christ himself, or express revelation of the Spirit. And accordingly it has always been observed in the church, to the honour of God and of Christ, and as an effectual means in the Spirit's hands to raise us to newness of life, to confirm and quicken us in our Christian progress.

IV. Having thus taken a view of the Scripture grounds of the Sabbath, we may now proceed with advantage to speak of the great end and reason of its being appointed. I have already touched upon this under each head of discourse, but it may be worth our while to consider it apart; especially as we are so apt to lose sight of it; and content ourselves at best with a partial outward observation of the Lord's day, instead of converting it wholly to our spiritual benefit and improvement. And what can this end be, but the very same which God had in the creation of man, to dispose the way of all flesh toward the attainment of everlasting salvation, to turn our hearts to him, as their centre of rest,

and the sole fountain of our happiness, to secure heaven to us, and bring us to himself. When God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, we are told it was because "in it he had rested from all his work." Understand this right, and you will perceive that the chief design of its being consecrated to a religious use was, that we might give all diligence to enter with him into his rest, embrace it as a promise, think of it and seek it from him as our portion, and have it continually brought to our remembrance that "there remaineth a rest to the people of God;" Heb. iv. 9. When the Sabbath was renewed to the Jews, it was with an express command that every soul among them should cease from all manner of labour, because God rested on it from his work of creation. And therefore they were to rest upon it too; that, being at leisure from all other cares, they might attend strictly to the proper business of it, and keep it holy to the Lord, by devoting it to the care of their souls, and drawing nigh to him for their sanctification. When it was afterwards changed from the seventh day of the week to the first, in memory of Christ's resurrection. it still spoke the same language; but more clearly than ever, as Christ has now taken possession of heaven for us, washed us from our sins in his blood, and laid us under new obligations to live unto God, that we might follow him thither. So that every thing that is said concerning the Sabbath, both the first appointment of it, and the alterations which were afterwards made in it, sufficiently direct us to the principal end and design of it, which is under God to make and keep us holy, and check the growth of a worldly spirit in us, which is the dead sleep of the soul, and would be the death of all our hopes. For this reason, I say, God, who knows our frame, how prone we are to forget him, and what a snare the world is to us, has

ordained that every six days' labour should be succeeded by a day of rest from all the occupations and employments of life; that by spending it in devout exercises, improving ourselves in religious knowledge, confirming ourselves in holy resolutions, and continually reviewing the state of our souls, we might secure, and be fitted for a happy eternity, And if the need we have of it, its useful tendency, and the good effect it would produce wherever it is duly observed, was well considered, I am persuaded it would put an end to all disputes concerning the morality of it; as that means obedience to a divine command, a fitness to beget and cherish in us good dispositions, and confirm us in the love of God, and the practice of all other morality. And if we have not this end in view, the great, sacred purpose of it will be lost upon us; and not keeping it holy as a working-time with God, for our souls, for heaven, we keep it in vain. It is well known to those who, in the spirit of regeneration, are endeavouring to get above the world, how hard it is not to be entangled in it. And if all would consider the necessity of choosing God for their portion, and setting their affections on things above, of preparing themselves for him, and for their eternal abode with him, and what danger they are in of neglecting this from the perpetually returning cares and business of life, they would soon see the necessity and great use of the Sabbath, the wisdom and love of God in giving it as an unalterable law to mankind, gladly receive it, and bless him for putting such an advantage into their hands. When you are called upon to mind the one thing needful, to give up your names to the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive him into your hearts, you are apt to complain of ignorance, worldly incumbrances, the care of a family, want of time, bad memories, and what not. But before you settle upon such excuses, see whether the fault is not

wholly in yourselves, and whether you do not wilfully refuse your remedy. God knows all this; but cannot give up his right in you, nor leave you to perish, and therefore has provided beforehand for your case. You *have* time, you *have* means, you HAVE the help you want in the Lord's day; and if you let it pass from time to time unimproved, your blood will be upon your own heads. In a life of seventy years there are three thousand six hundred and forty Sabbaths. A few of these, and much more all of them, well employed, might give the right bent to your minds, and make you wise unto salvation. And on the other hand, how can you expect to have your spiritual work in any forwardness, so as either to know distinctly what it is, or keep it warm upon your hearts, if you mis-spend or neglect every one of them? You will deny the charge, and say, your appearance in this place bears witness for you that you are not regardless of the Sabbath. My brethren, attend diligently to what I say, and let the Lord sit in judgment upon you. The public worship of Almighty God, hearing the Scriptures read, and the word preached, is doubtless a most excellent and necessary part of every Sunday's duty; and I wish all thought so, and had this at least to plead for themselves, that they are regular in their attendance upon it. We bind this strictly upon you; we declare to you in God's name that without it there is no Sabbath-keeping; and that a careless absenting from the service of the church, or such indifference about it as to be frequently hindered from coming to it by frivolous excuses, is a certain mark of a graceless spirit and want of religion. It is a shame to mention how many in every parish, who call themselves Christians, spend the day in a mere sauntering idleness, how many make work for themselves by needless going abroad, or travelling, as if the day was almost set apart for that purpose, and how

hard some are to be taken off from the ordinary business of their calling. But I have a word to speak to those who have a better appearance, and are more scrupulous in this matter, and I pray God you may be willing to hear it. Still this may be nothing but form; and certainly is nothing else, when there is no searching into the soul, no more religious employment, no more aiming at growth in grace and holiness, in other parts of the day, than at other times. Would it grieve you to think you are of the number of those hypocrites, who "honour God with their lips, when their hearts are far from him?" See whether it is the aim of all you are doing in religion, to have your hearts recovered to him; and especially, whether you carefully and conscientiously employ your Sabbaths to this great purpose of all religion. Does the holiness of the day, and your observation of it, begin and end with the public service? Have you nothing more to do with God? Is there nothing more that you can do for your souls, to settle them in a habit of delight in and obedience to him, and enable you to serve him truly all the days of your lives? I do not mean that this is not every day's work; for it is your principal, great work in the world. If you were truly turned to the Lord, you would find time for it more or less every day; and if you are unconcerned about it, or leave it unfinished, better would it be for you that you had never been born. But because you are unavoidably engaged for the greatest part of your time in the duties of your station, or providing the necessaries of life; and (observe) because the great end of your living for ever with God in heaven must at all events be secured; he has therefore discharged you from all other cares one day in seven, that by the constant return of it you might be reminded of your eternal state, and moreover bound it upon you by an express command to keep it holy, in attending closely upon it to the sacred

business of your salvation. This, I say again, and nothing but this, is keeping it holy. Whatever other subordinate ends there may be of the Sabbath, such as its being a necessary time of rest for man and beast, this is the great one. The care of the soul, in order to its everlasting rest, is God's chief aim in it, and should be ours. And whatever else we do or forbear, though we are never so constant and regular in our attendance on public worship, yet if we neglect the private duty of communing with our hearts in the presence of God, and waiting on him in prayer and holy meditation, for a supply of the Spirit of grace to bless his Sabbaths to us, we have neither liveliness in them, nor life from them. What we call the service of the day, if we think it the whole service, leaves us just as it finds us, as little turned to God, and as little prepared for the coming of our Lord, as ever; and will have this farther bad effect, to seal us up in blindness and self-deceit. We shall flatter ourselves that in the main our hearts are right with God, and that with respect to this command at least he has nothing to lay to our charge, when we present him only with the lame sacrifice of an outward worship, and do no more in reality to the true sanctification of the Lord's day, and of ourselves in it, than if we cut off a dog's neck. See Isaiah, lxvi. 1—4.

I have now set before you the law of the Sabbath. And if either the early appointment of it, as the first law to the first man, and in him to all his posterity, or the confirmation and renewal of it in the law of the ten commandments, with a particular emphasis in the wording of it, or the continuing of it, and regard paid to it by the first Christians, can enforce it upon us; if its being a part of every fresh revelation which God made of himself, or the apparent reason and usefulness of it, can recommend it to our approbation and esteem, we must

necessarily think it a matter of very high concernment to us, and the observation of it our bounden duty, and an essential point of all true religion.

What I have to do farther, is to add a brief exhortation; and if you should be found wanting in this case, as probably you will, then to endeavour, with the help of God, to show you your sin, and what you must do in the peril of your souls.

I may now say to you, in the name of God, "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy." God commands it, and your wants require it, and the religious improvement of it is of unspeakable consequence to you. It is no less than a design for heaven and immortal glory. Keep it then as a day devoted to God and to your dearest interest. Away with the poor formality of a Sunday's dress, or a bodily rest, or a few hours' outward worship only; for it is nothing else in those who do no more. Keep it holy, by putting yourselves in a posture of holiness, and study to advance in it. Turn from the world, and let all your thoughts run in another channel. Consider, as you do on other days, what work you have now before you, and how to finish it to the best advantage. For a work you have, set out to your hands, and as you follow it, so will the whole state and form of your lives be; either forgetfulness of God, and neglect of your souls, or a continual regard to them in the settled frame and temper of your minds. This day, converted to its proper use, would set you in the way you should go; and if ever you should be so unhappy as to turn aside from it, the next Sabbath, when you thus know the end and design of every Sabbath, would call you into it again. See, my friends, how God has contrived in mercy to meet you as it were at every turn. Be you as ready to meet *him*. Think of that time when you must meet him in judgment, either to enter with him into his rest, or hear

the sentence of eternal separation from him. Think what a blessed advantage you have in your Sabbaths to prepare yourselves for a place at his right hand, and with what joy you will look back upon them, if they have been spent in seeking after him, and brought you happily to your last eternal Sabbath. Oh! how happy would you be now, if your consciences could bear you witness that you keep this end of them steadily in view, and are ready to say to every one of them as it comes, 'Welcome, blest day! Come, my soul, this is a day of important business betwixt thy God and thee. Lose it not, forget not the design and use of it, remember to keep it holy. Call in thy scattered thoughts, and fix them upon the single point of thy salvation. It is the appointment and will of God that thou shouldst now have nothing else to do. Thy worldly affairs are in his hands, and be sure he will take care of them, so as to make all things work together for thy good. "If thou shalt call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words," but framing thy inward thoughts, and suiting thy whole behaviour to the sacredness of it, he has engaged himself by promise to remember and reward thee for it; Isa. lviii. 13, 14. Arise, and shake thyself from the dust. Lift up thyself to the glorious hope which is set before thee, and by the loving-kindness of God so statedly brought to thy remembrance, and leave all meaner things. This day was blessed and sanctified from the beginning, that thou mightest make it the greatest of all blessings to thyself, by acquainting thyself with God, increasing thy longings after him, and securing thy portion in him. On this day thy Lord rose from the dead. Think of thy interest in him; think how he died and rose again to purchase and

ensure thy everlasting happiness; dwell with delight and gratitude on the contemplation of those joys he has prepared for thee, and remember that all depends on thy own rising with him to a new state of faith, love, and purity of heart.'

But methinks I hear you saying, This is strict. You know you do not thus keep the Sabbath as a sacred law, never to be violated, by devoting it to religious improvement and the care of your souls; and therefore I fear you will be ready to say, in your own defence, that you need not. If this is indeed the inward thought of your hearts, I pray God I may meet with it; and shall now observe to you from hence what your temper and disposition is with regard to your salvation in general, and obedience to the divine law in particular. This is the very point to which I would draw all I have said, as knowing it will be in vain, if it does not bring you to a deep consideration of your state, and by that to conviction of sin.

If you find in yourselves a secret unwillingness to close with God's design in a true Sabbath-keeping, and in the main attend no more to the great concern of your recovery to him in holiness than you do at other times, what can be a surer sign than this that religion is at a low ebb in you, and that you do not "seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, in the first place?" The poor soul within you wants its relief, the necessity is urgent, the day is come for your thinking of it and working for it, and yet is passed over with extreme negligence and unconcern. And can you persuade yourselves that you are in earnest about your salvation? Certainly, if it was a day of some great extraordinary advantage for this life, and you had a reasonable expectation of a tenfold blessing on your worldly substance, you would not lose a minute of it. Apply this as you easily may. Turn your

eyes inward. Deceive yourselves no longer. Eternity, eternity is overlooked, and the gain of it despised. It is plain you have other business in the world, and that your hearts are otherwise engaged.

Again, in the neglect of this command, where is your obedience? and how will you ever be able to stand in judgment before God? "The wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23; and "sin is the transgression of the law;" 1 John, iii. 4. It is the great design of all Scripture to bring us to the acknowledgment and belief of these truths. And yet you are fearless and unawakened, and think not of the danger you are in by living in opposition to the will of God, or but lightly regarding it. Now, therefore, my brethren, for the love of God, and in pity to your souls, see, in this instance, what the frame and temper of your minds is with regard to obedience in general. You must begin somewhere; the word and law of God must judge you; something must strike conviction into your hearts, and fill them with trembling and astonishment. And whether it is to be this day or no, I am sure I have found out your sin for you. If you do not pay a conscientious regard to the great law of the Sabbath, you are guilty before God, sinners in the whole form of your lives, whatever else you do, and liable to that dreadful sentence, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" Gal. iii. 10. And if to this we add what was mentioned before, the general backwardness of mankind to employ the Sabbath in caring and working for the soul; if the spirit of disobedience shows itself with regard to a command which is more especially intended for the soul, and of such eminent use and service to it, we stand condemned. Here is a most melancholy proof against all such, in both these respects, that they are not yet entered upon the way of salvation. They do not

separate themselves to God now, as his people, by labouring to enter into his rest, in a sincere observation of the *fourth* commandment, and therefore miserably deceive themselves if they have hope towards him. If they live and die in this state, when the time comes for the final separation of the good from the bad, they must be given up to their own choice, and sentenced to depart from him for ever, " into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" Matt. xxv. 41. Give way to the thought, that possibly this may be your own condition now whilst I am speaking, that you are not careful to make a right use of your Sabbaths, take no delight in them as opportunities for your souls, live in the continual breach of a plain command, and have great cause to suspect the soundness and sincerity of your hearts with regard to other points of obedience. When you make the trial, and bring yourselves to the touchstone of God's law, in the right spiritual understanding of it, you will find you have made short work with it; and that as to any true obedience to any one command, from a principle of subjection to God and love of Christ, it is no more weighty upon your consciences in any other instances than it is in this. Begin the examination. As I said before, you must begin somewhere. " The law must be your schoolmaster to bring you to Christ," Gal. iii. 24; and without a knowledge of your state, and a hearty conviction of your danger in sin, you cannot take one step toward him. And where then will you fly in the peril of your souls? " For this man is the peace," Mic. v. 5; " neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;" Acts, iv. 12. And I must now farther tell you, as the conclusion of the whole, that when you are grounded in a lively sense of God's mercy in him, and lay hold on him by faith, when you see your

danger, and your deliverance, when you have found relief in him from the guilt of sin and the accusations of conscience, the law of God will be precious in your eyes, and your hearts turned to him in obedience. Then it will be the great wish of your souls that the Redeemer may come to you in the fulness of the blessings of the Gospel, and in the power of his Spirit, as well as the grace of remission. Christ in us will teach us to say, as he did, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!" Heb. x. 9; and when once his love is warm upon our hearts, it will fill us with grief and concern to think we should ever pass that saying of his so lightly over as we have done. "If ye love me, keep my commandments;" John, xiv. 15. And especially, the law of the Sabbath will be very dear to us, as a most excellent means appointed of God to keep us close to him in the general bent of our minds, in the whole form of our lives, in our daily addresses to him, and in every good work. We shall know of a truth, that in the want of a disposition to keep the Sabbath-day holy, according to the will of God, we have neglected our interest in him, were evil affected to all religion, and had no concern for our souls at any other time. And we shall not then need to be told what is a true keeping of the Lord's day, or what a mis-spending or profanation of it. Worldly thoughts will be dismissed, and worldly business entirely laid aside, with thankfulness to God for obliging us to it, and providing so much better employment for us. We shall think a penny gained on that day a pound lost; nay, a canker in our estate, and a curse upon our families. And as to sports and pastimes, if all the world should join to allow and countenance us in it, our own hearts will tell us that every thing of that kind is contrary to the design and inconsistent with the seriousness of the Sabbath, and a sad abuse of it. In a word, we shall think and judge, as all do who have their

eyes opened, that God's work is the business of God's day, be diligent in it for the command's sake, and for the sake of our souls, and pray devoutly, "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." Bring us in repentance to Christ for mercy; turn our hearts to that rest which thou hast prepared for us in him; and fix us in love and dutiful subjection to thee through him, our only Saviour and Redeemer.

THE END

LONDON:
PRINTED BY JAMES MOYES, GREVILLE STREET.